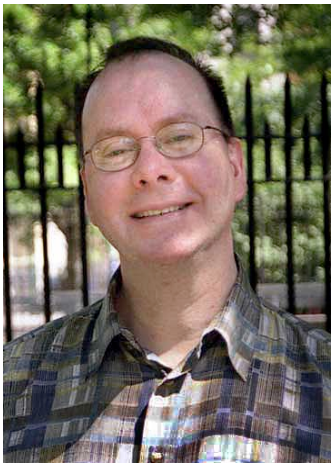
Victor Frost



# Salon Music

## for piano trio, op. 59

FOUR WINDS PRESS

*New York*

## **Salon Music** for piano trio, op. 59

The opening waltz in this set of four *morceaux de salon* was composed in 1985 for the present forces, but quickly arranged for concert band. The latter was a genre in which I was enjoying considerable success at the time, the arrangement simply devolving from the ongoing demand for more repertoire from my pen for such forces. The version of Valse triste for piano trio fell by the wayside when the band piece (fairly simple to prepare and perform) took off. Now, the latter version has, until now, always been listed in programs as my opus 59. But henceforth the band waltz must assume instead the designation 59a, because Valse triste becomes now but an excerpt from this suite of four salon numbers. An overarching unity does obtain between these simple pieces, despite their having been composed over a span of some twenty-seven years now: all three of the new numbers I added this month (Havanaise, Soft Shoe, Dyngus Day) conform to the same *tactus* (counting pulse) as the original waltz! They also all take pretty much the same form: introduction, A–B–A, coda; with an elaboration of material from B leading to the restatement of A, and the coda–sometimes more perfunctory, sometimes less–based on material already established.

1. Valse triste. The title comes from Sibelius. There is by the way a motive, played in unison by the strings just before the recap of the A-section, out of the master's Second Symphony. A few people over the years have managed to catch this tip of the hat. I was surprised, however, when a resemblance of the main tune to the Israeli national anthem (hardly a waltz!) was pointed out to me; I'm quite sure I had never heard it before composing the present number. The wistful waltz was in fact first written for a memorial concert of chamber music to honor a recently departed tubist. At first I thought I should inscribe it to his memory, but I hesitated, inasmuch as I really didn't know him. Ultimately I chose to dedicate my Valse triste to the first champion of the work in its version for band, conductor Hal Janks.

2. Havanaise. The pianist contributes a simple habañera rhythm against the cello's first statement of the main tune, but steps aside to allow the strings to finish it alone. When the melody comes back at the end, he does not seem content to let the piece as a whole end this way, without him. He fashions a pert right-hand counterpoint to what the strings are recapping. Then his left hand clinches things with a button on the number's very last beat. By way of contrast in between, all the instruments contribute to the vehemence of the work's B-section in the relative minor. To my friend, the guitarist Pablo Sáinz Villegas.

3. Soft Shoe. Irregular accents seem to indicate a performer past his prime in this characteristic piece. The cello actually gets lost: my fault; he undoubtedly got bored with the same two measures I gave him to repeat over and over. Our protagonist does catch himself, introducing a "catchy" new motive, even if a wee bit earlier than it was supposed to have been! The alert violinist sets things right again, thankfully. A final irregularity, as a tiny bit of the work's B-section provides

an unexpected coda. Apparently, with all those goings-on, the players forget for a moment that they have already completely traversed the work's trio! When they realize their mistake, they start stretching the music into a deliberate-sounding conclusion. Sounds convincing to me, anyway! To my erstwhile piano teacher, Jon Klibonoff.

4. Dyngus Day. In Buffalo every year the Polish community has a kind of reflection of Mardi gras: instead of a celebration before Lent, they have one on the day after Easter when, supposedly, things are returning to normal! (Although this tradition is strong is Poland and elsewhere, apparently nowhere do they do Dyngus Day as big as in this American city. Go figure.) Happy polkas impel much of the festive dancing at countless formal and informal gatherings. This despite the fact that the word polka actually derives from the denizens' Czech cousins, and does not refer in any way to the Polish nationality. My music is appropriately perky …and quirky! To my friend, tubist Charles Wazanowski.

In my younger years, I always figured that some day I would contribute a piece to the piano trio repertoire, as I had done with pretty much all the other standard genres, particularly in the realm of chamber music. Valse triste was a *pièce d'occasion* that might make an enjoyable supplement to a proper, substantial trio when I got around to writing one. But it really couldn't stand on its own as chamber music the way it manifestly could in the military band realm, where after all light, shorter pieces like unto this ternary waltz are pretty much the rule.

But the august composition I was expecting for piano trio never materialized. Meanwhile the winds version of Valse triste always seemed more …earnest, less flippant than its piano trio counterpart. A recent broadcast on the BBC culminated in Dvořák's Dumky Trio. During the "interval," Stephen Johnson supplied an analysis of this work whose live performance was looming. He established a distinction between salon-type music written for the convenient wedding and bar mitzvah combination of piano, violin, and cello, and the serious, throughcomposed type of masterpieces for the same instruments that we have from Beethoven on down. Dvořák deftly balances both compositional styles in his Dumky, accounting in part for its great popularity.

Now, I can safely deny ever having been a masterpiece-obsessed composer, but in the case of the genre piano trio, it seems I was as conceptually hidebound as anybody else. (I recall similar misgivings about the light music I was writing for piano quintet in my opus 20 Dance Suite. That work had a quite arduous, more than decade-long gestation.) I felt liberated by Johnson's inquiry, confirmed in every detail by the stirring performance of Dvořák's seminal trio which followed on the night of the broadcast.

So maybe the old Valse in its trio incarnation fit into a mould that was worthy of further cultivation. (Mixing highbrow and lowbrow like Dvořák occurred to me, of course, but I quickly decided to stick with just the salon style. This gave rise to

the title above for the expansion of the composition I effected over the past few weeks.)  Perhaps it was really true that the original piano trio version of Valse triste couldn't hold up on its own.  So now the number has, at long last, some company, and fun company at that!

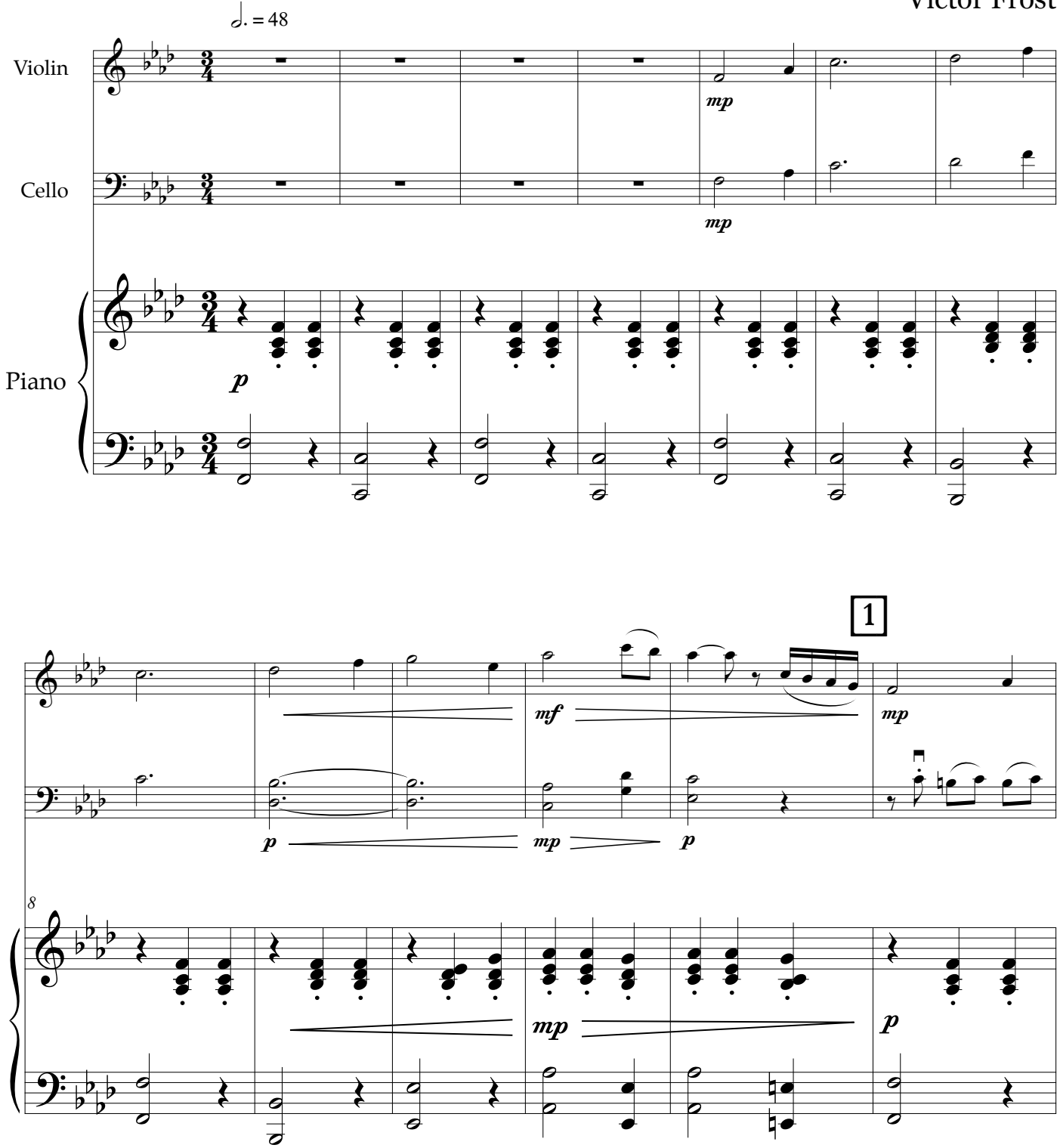
Victor Frost
27 IV 12
New York City

# Salon Music

for piano trio, op. 59

## 1. Valse triste

Victor Frost

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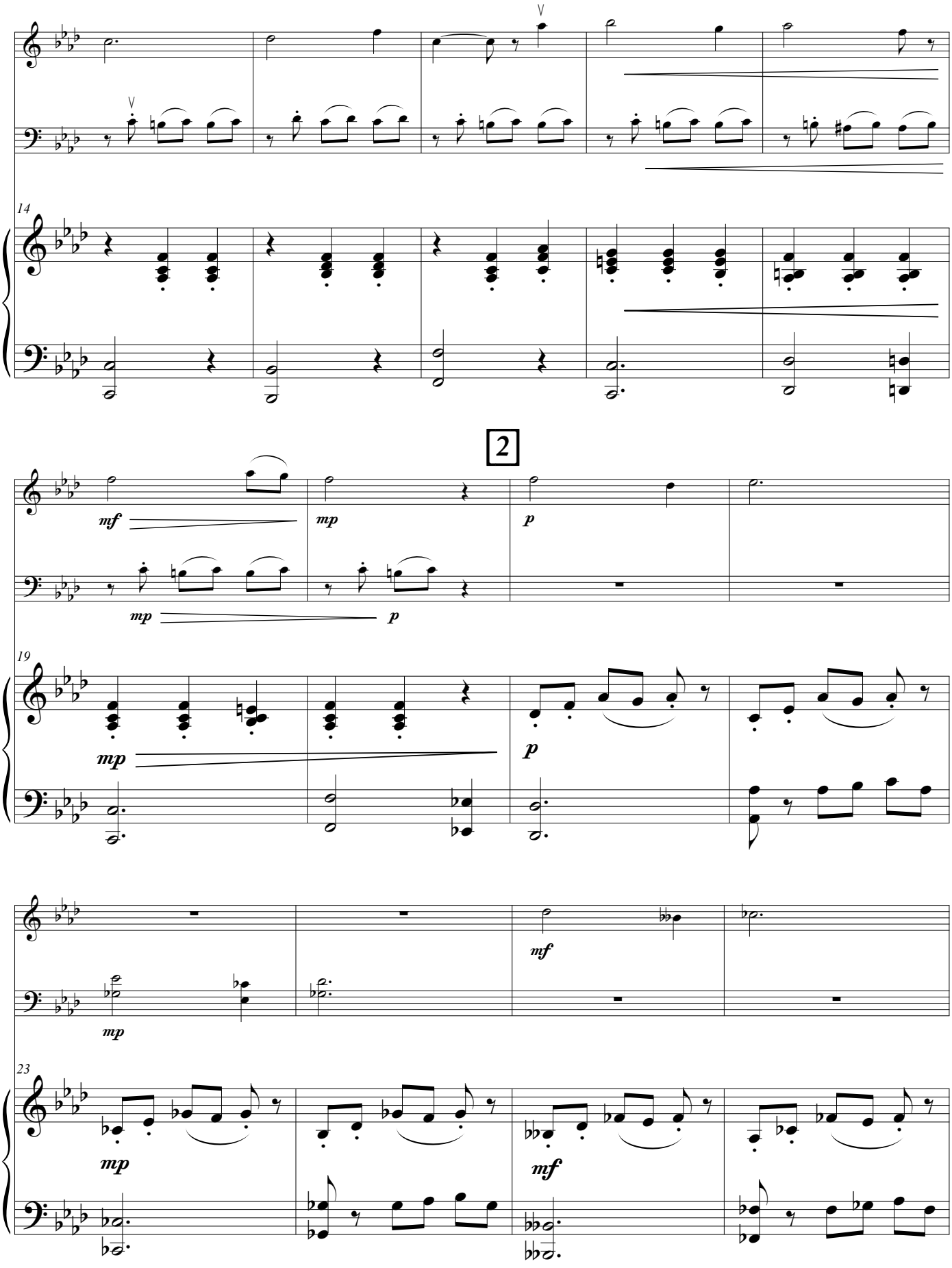
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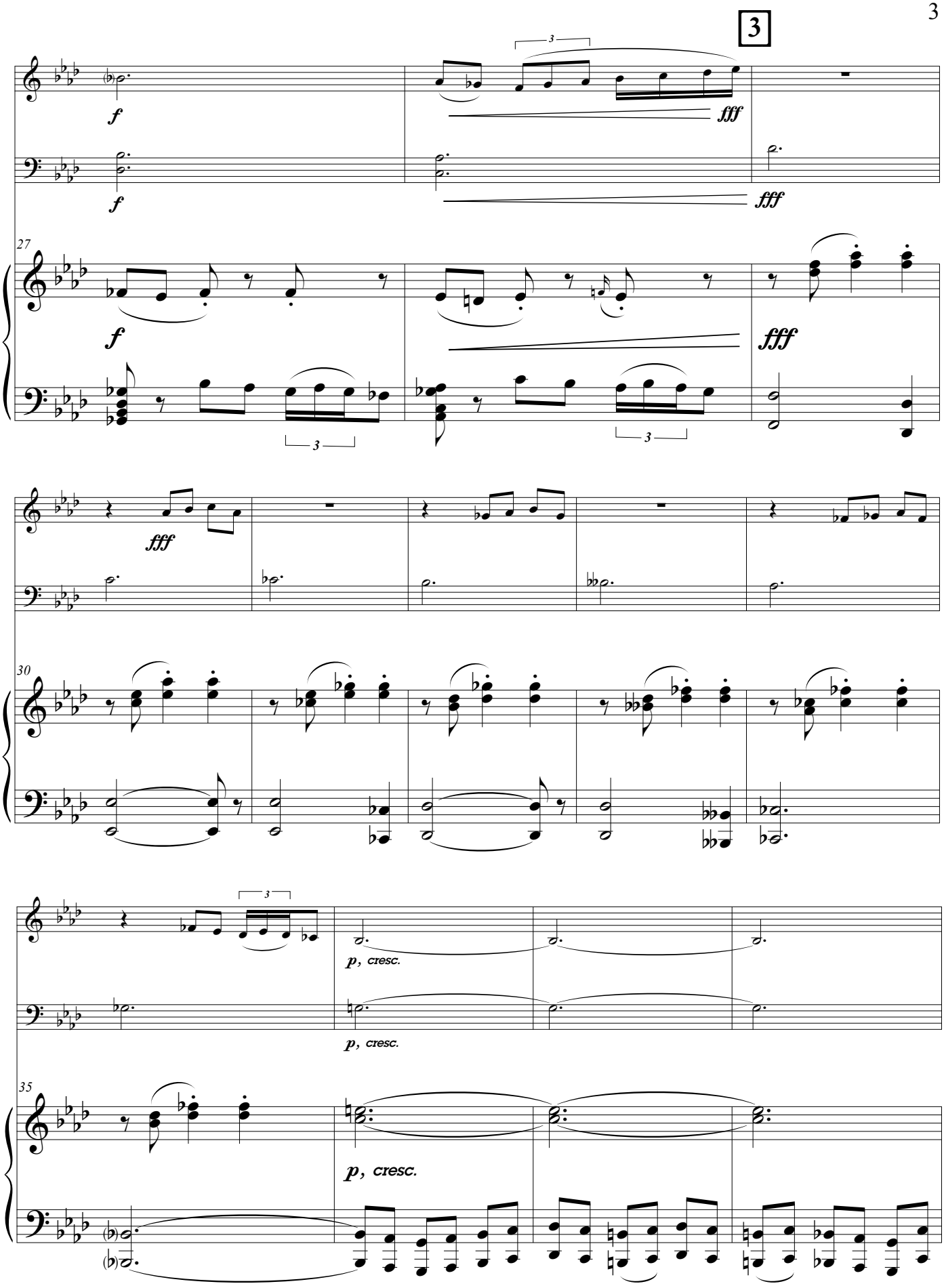
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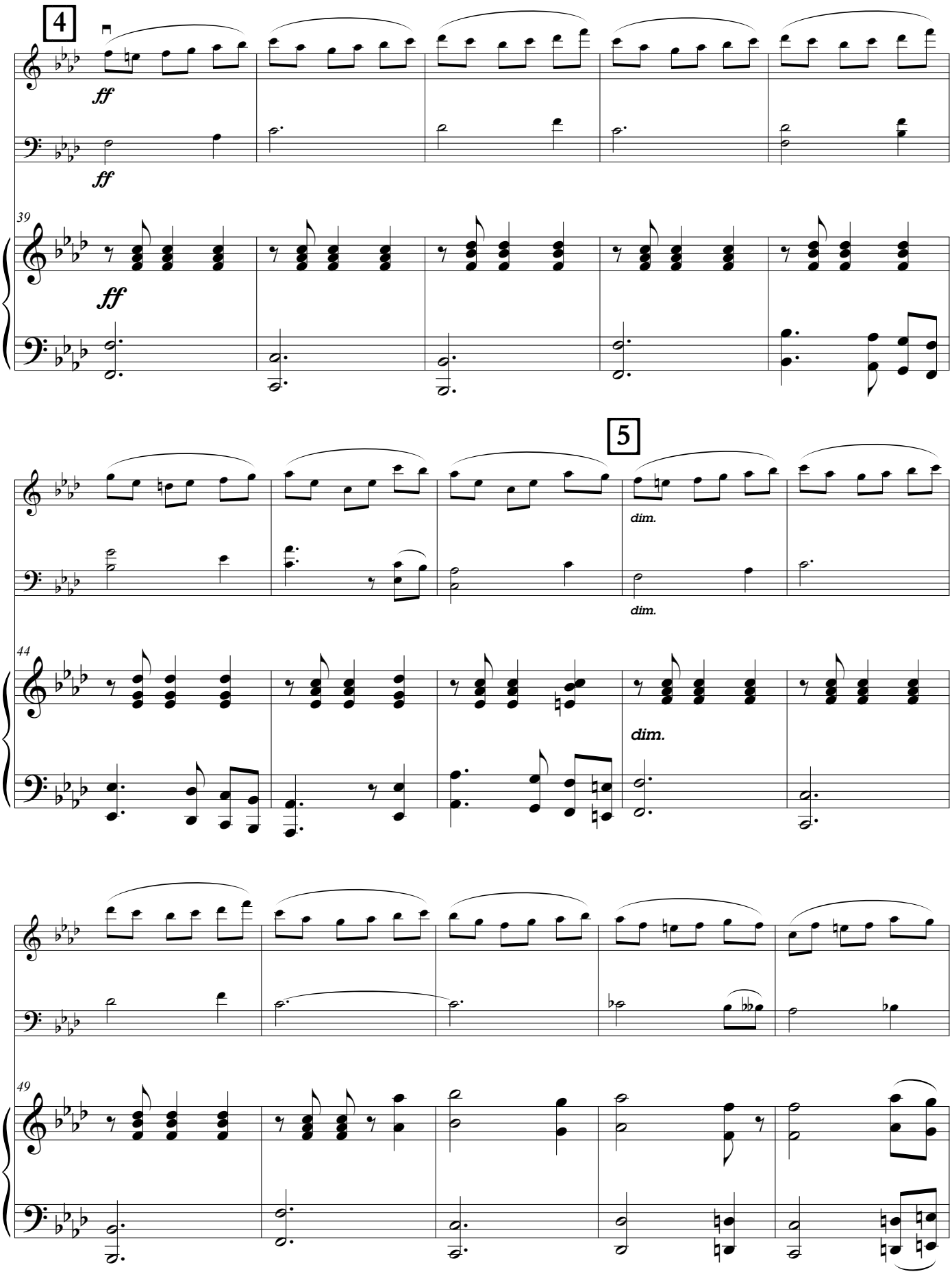
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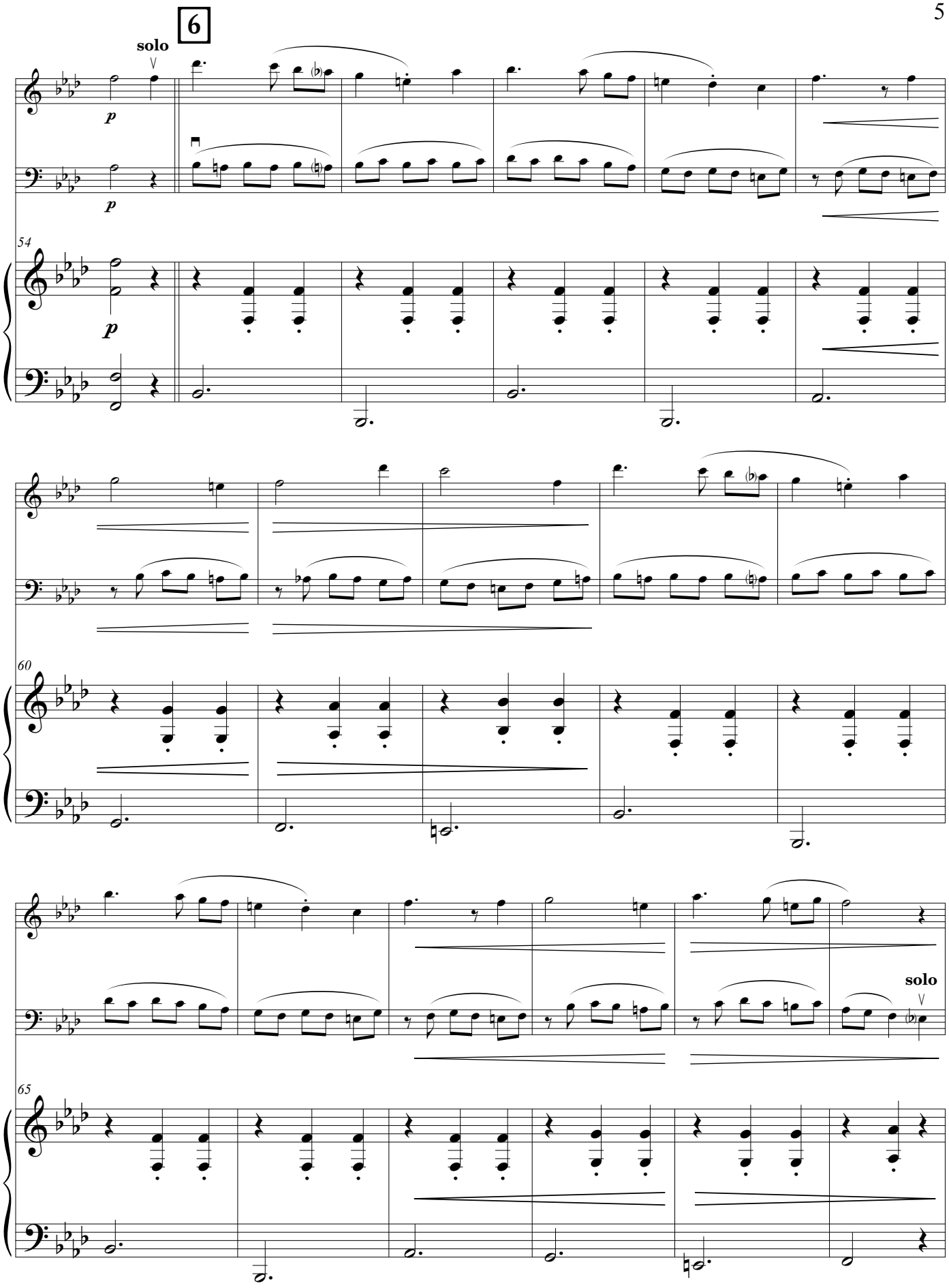
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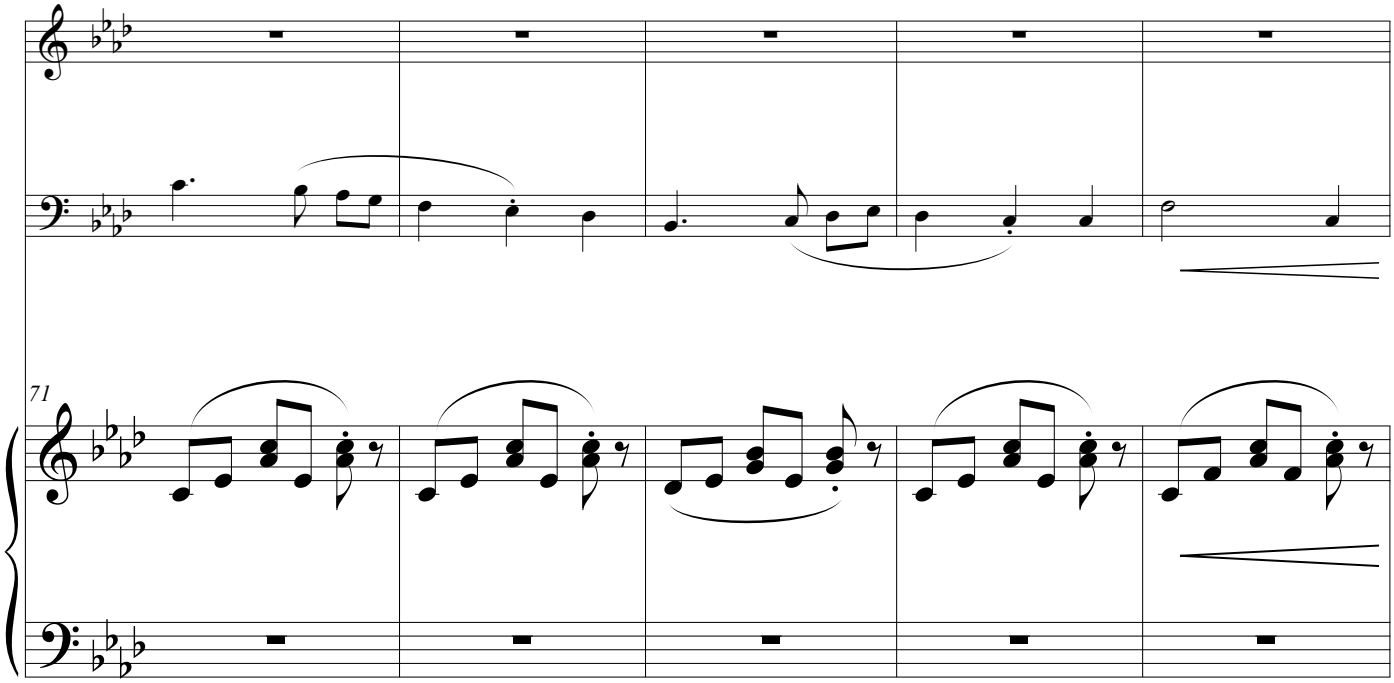

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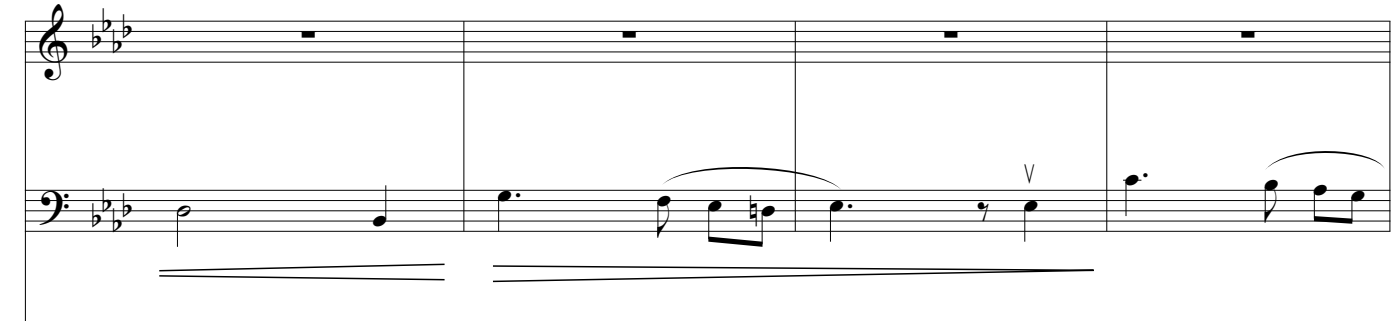

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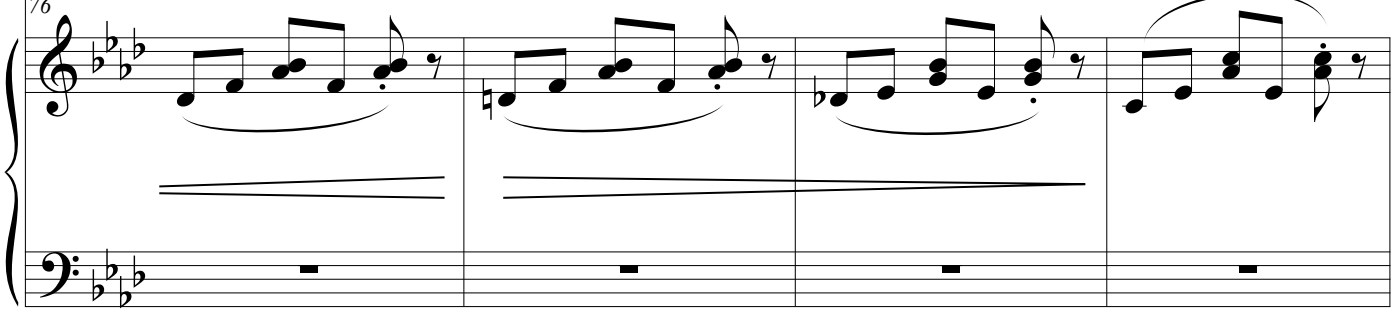

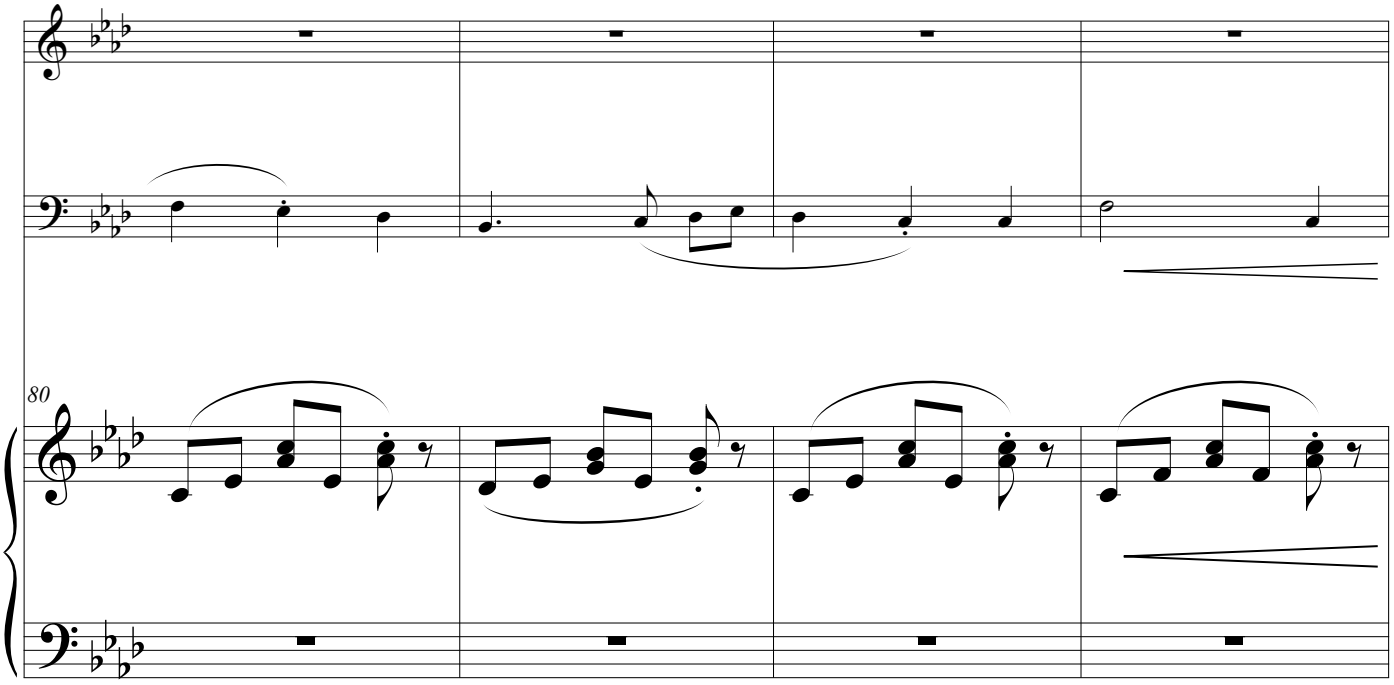
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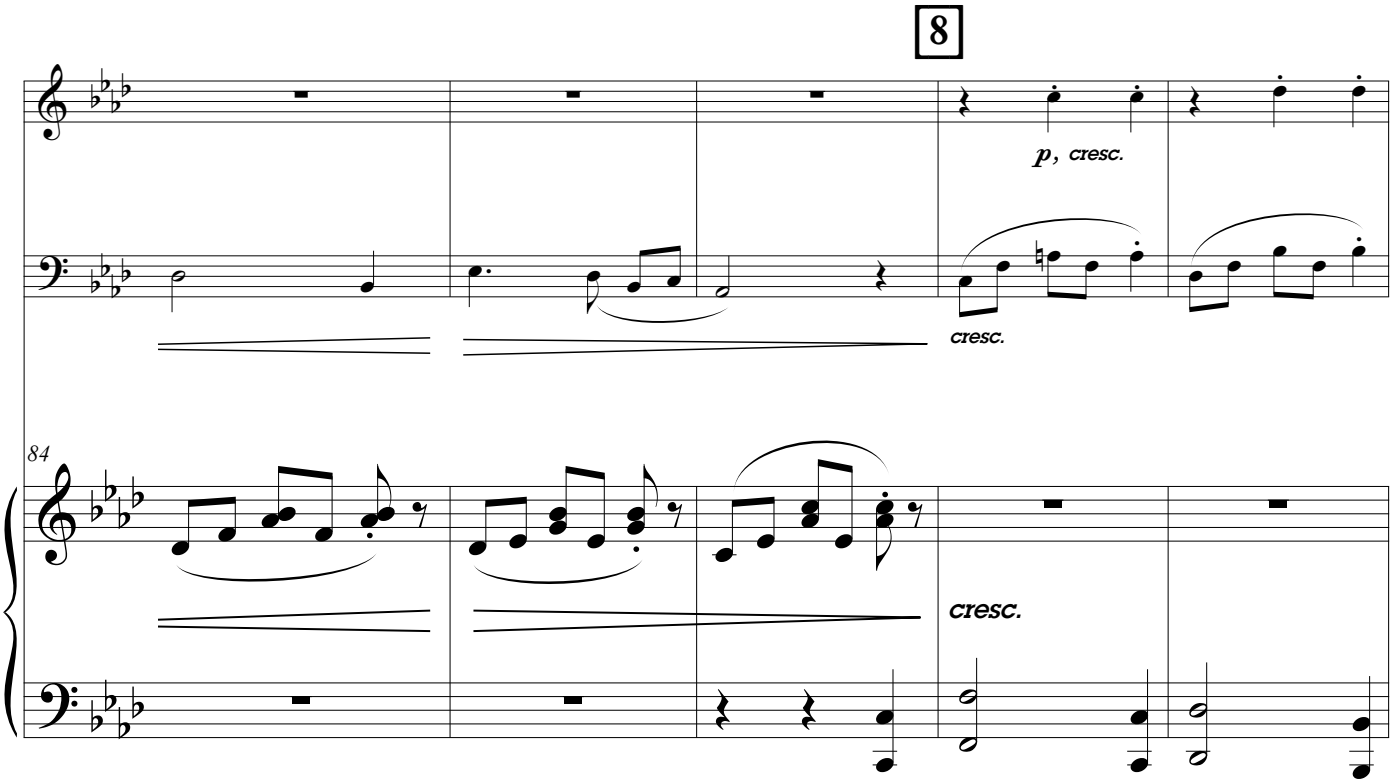
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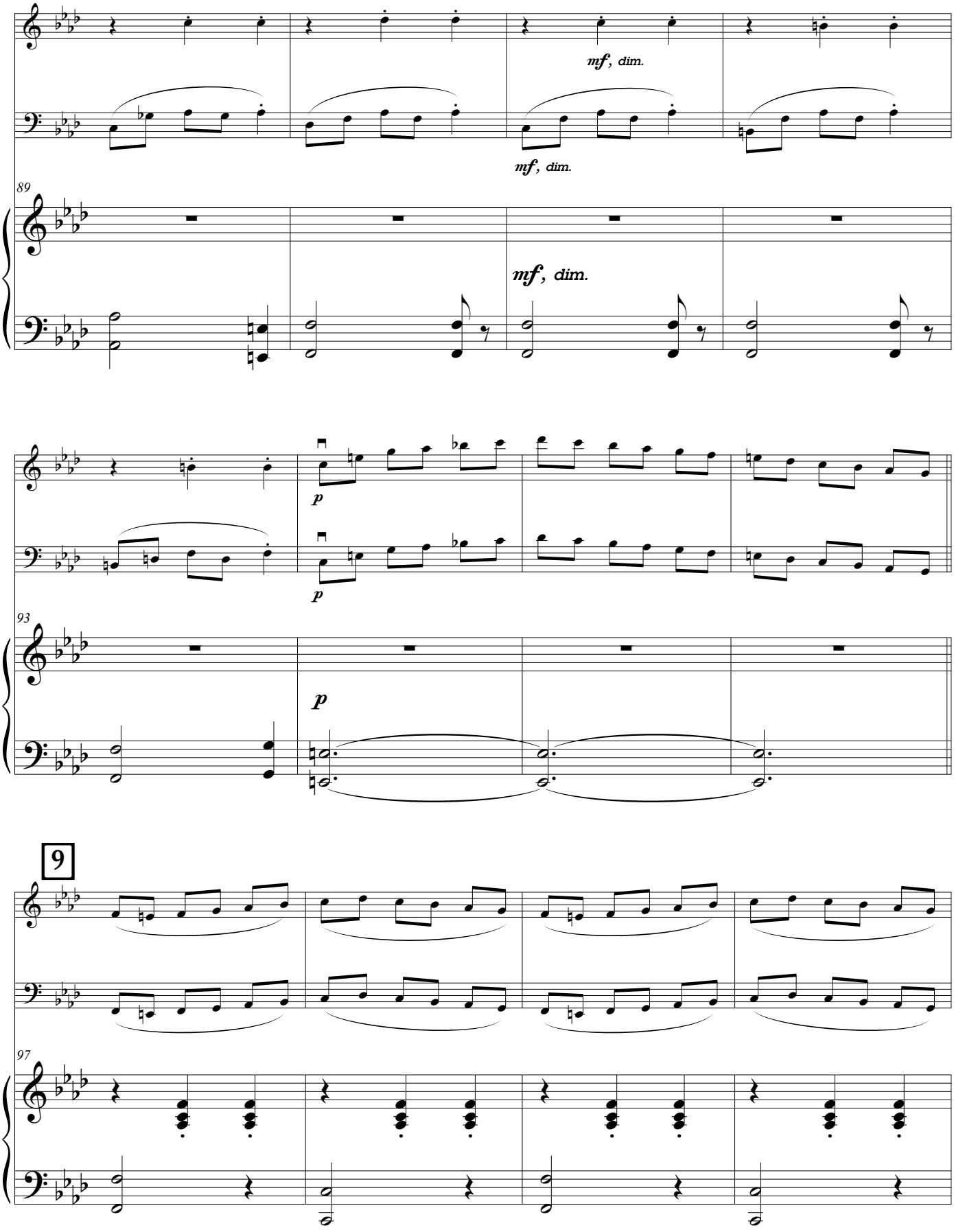
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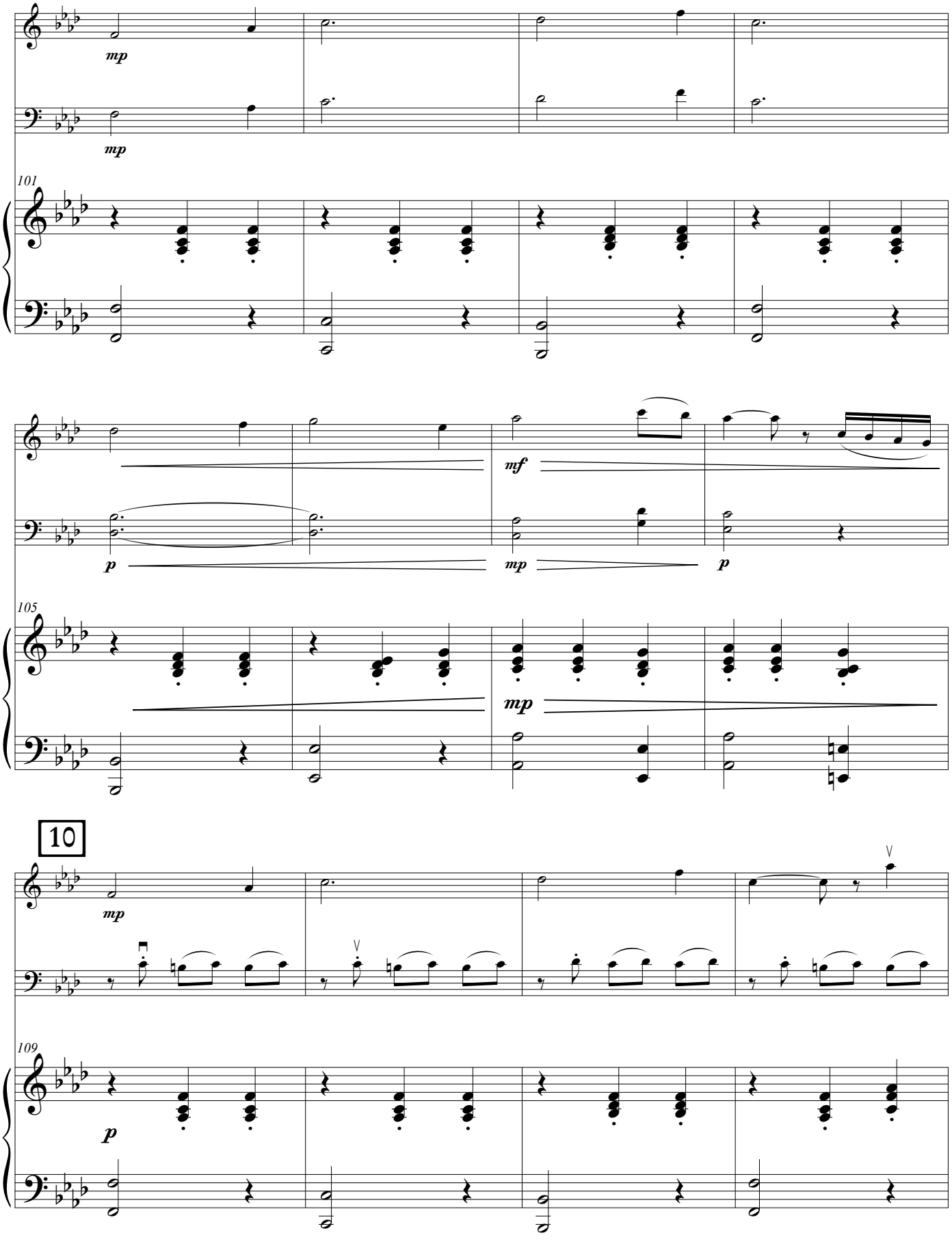
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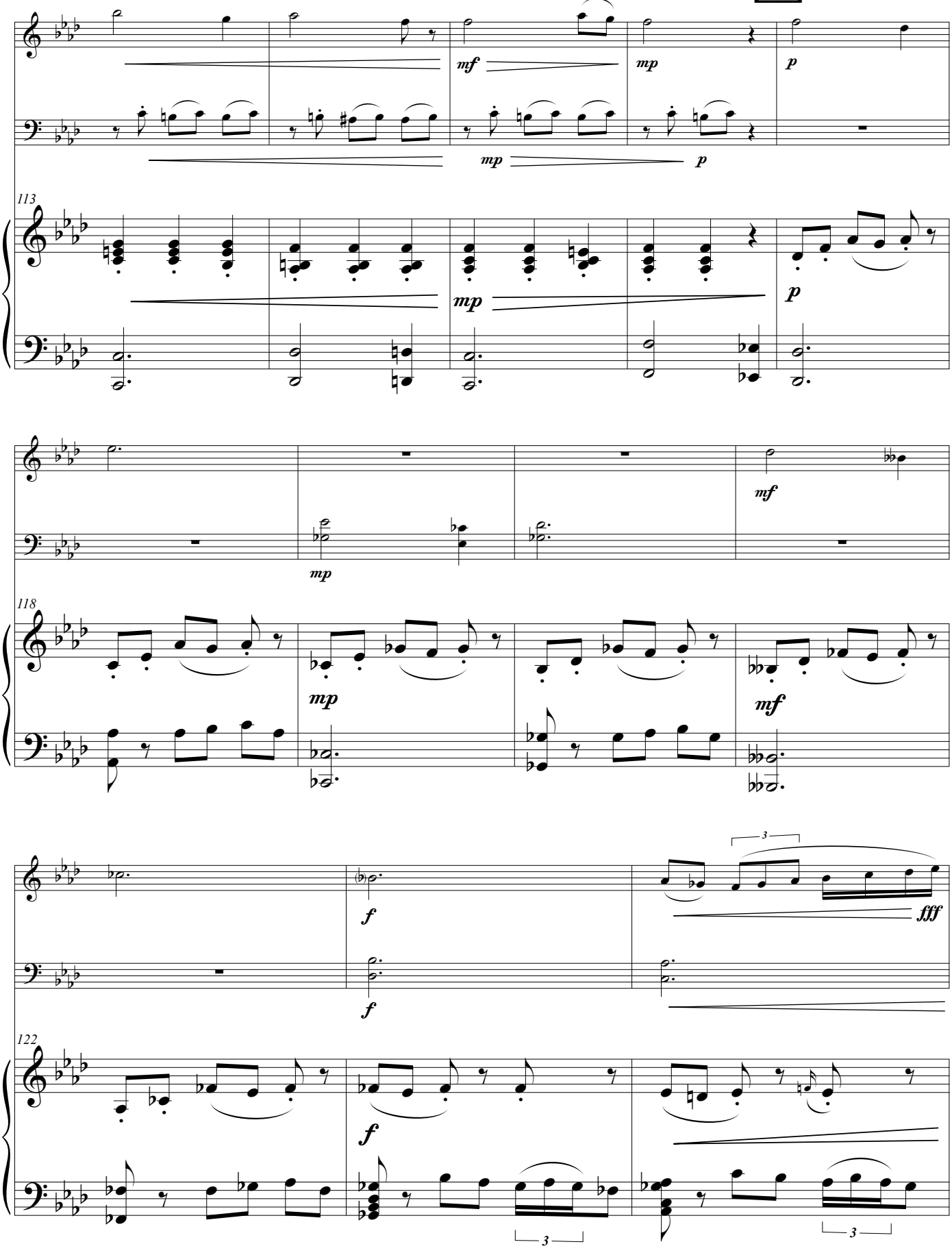

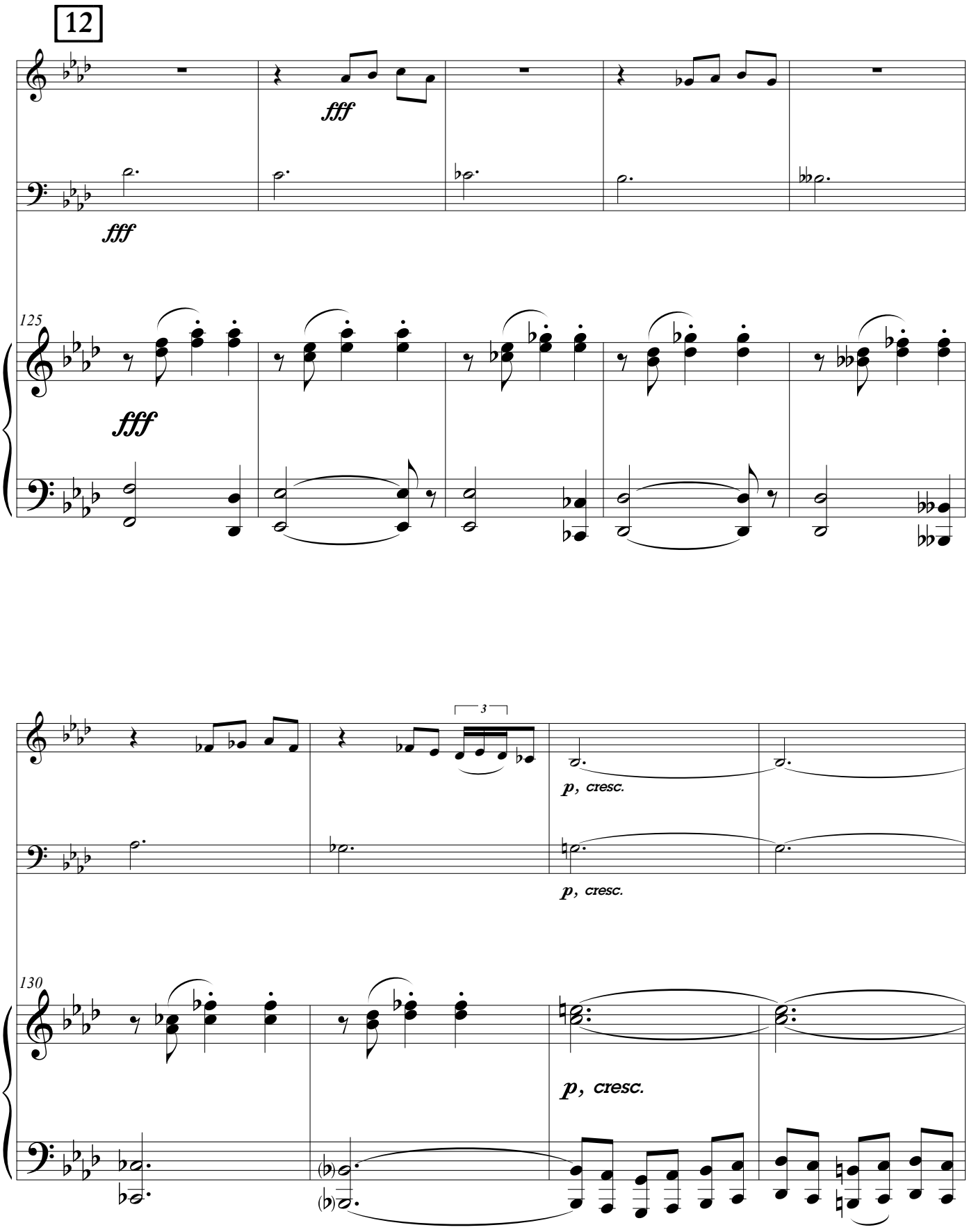
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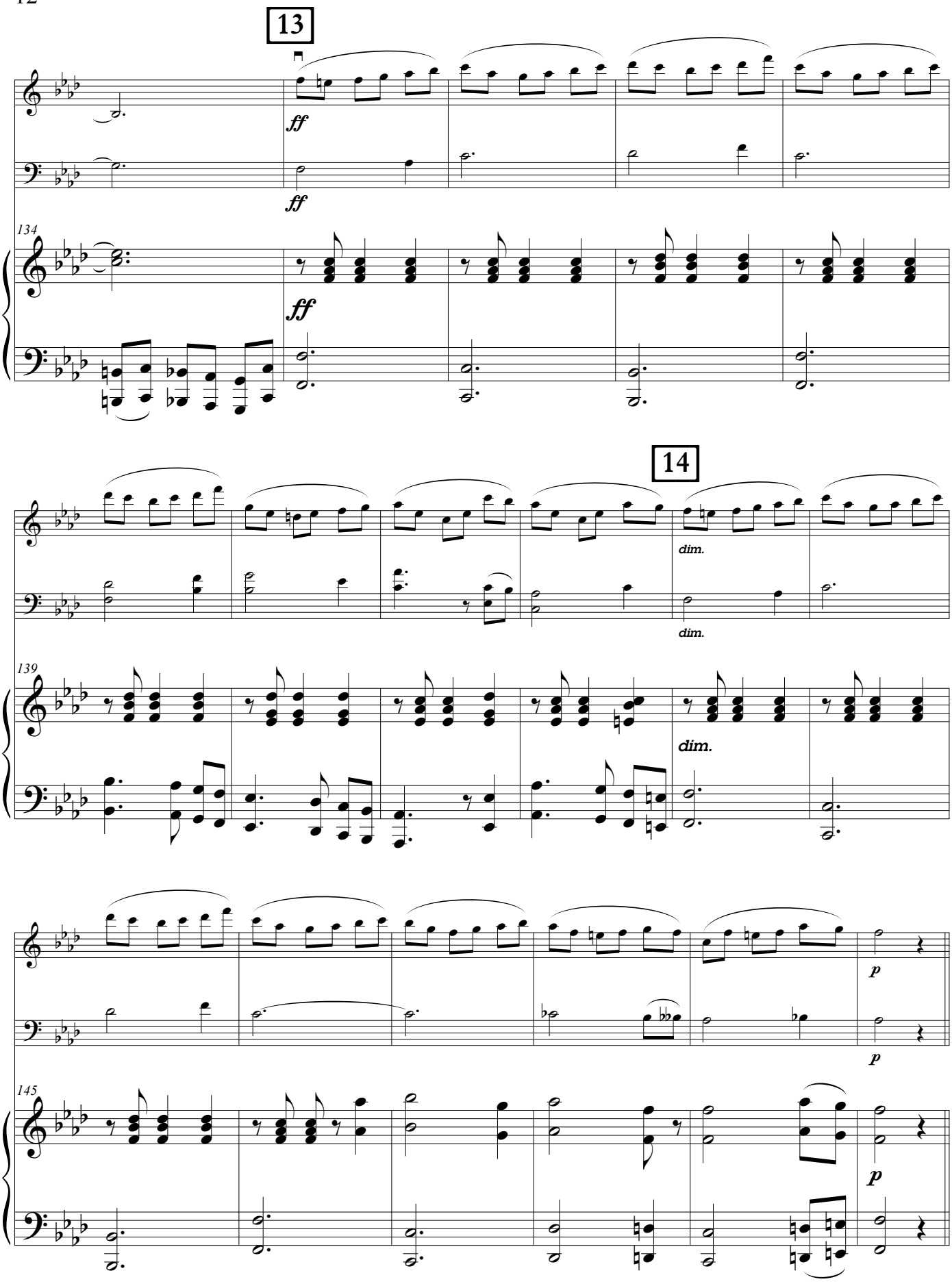
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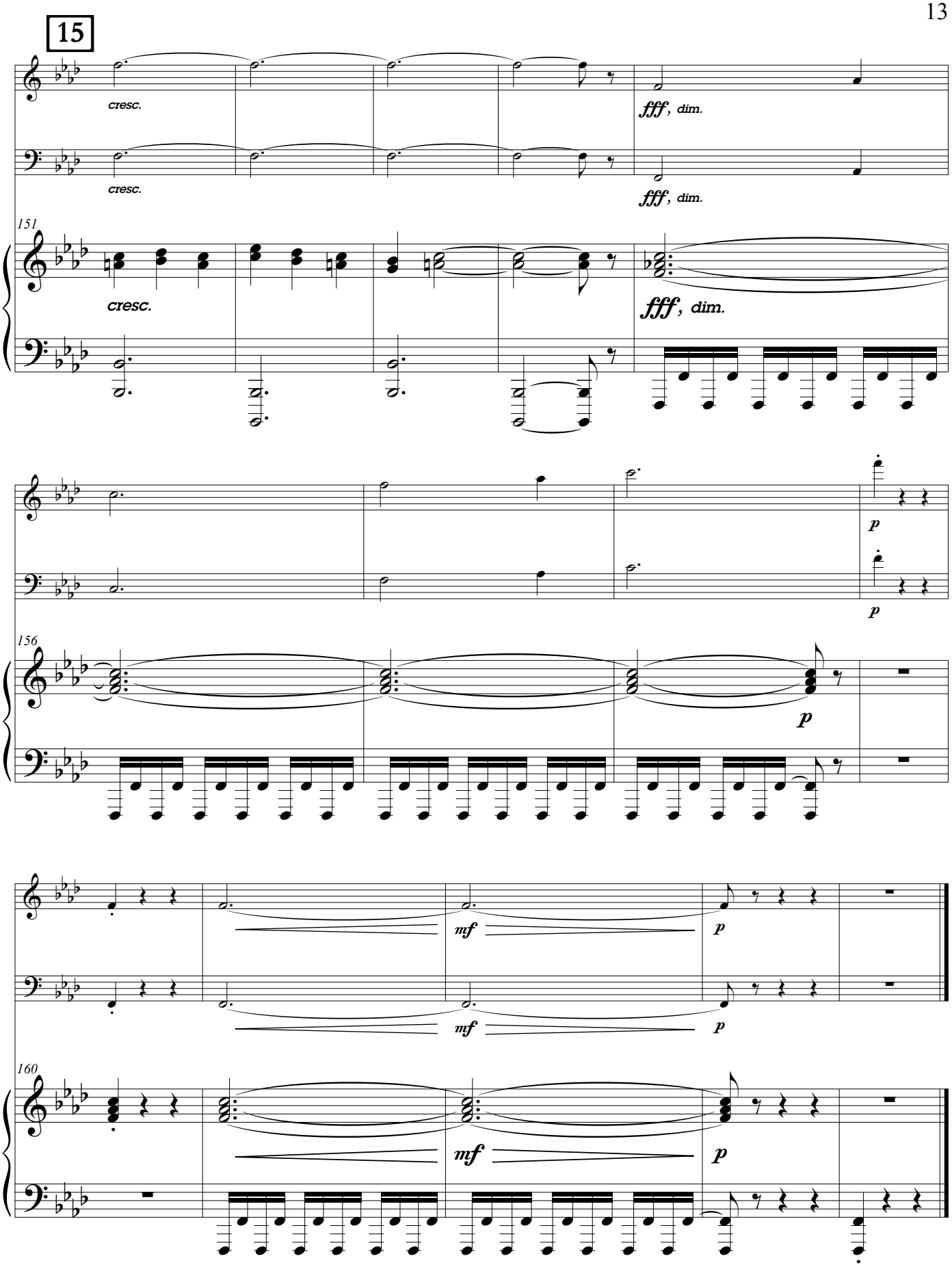
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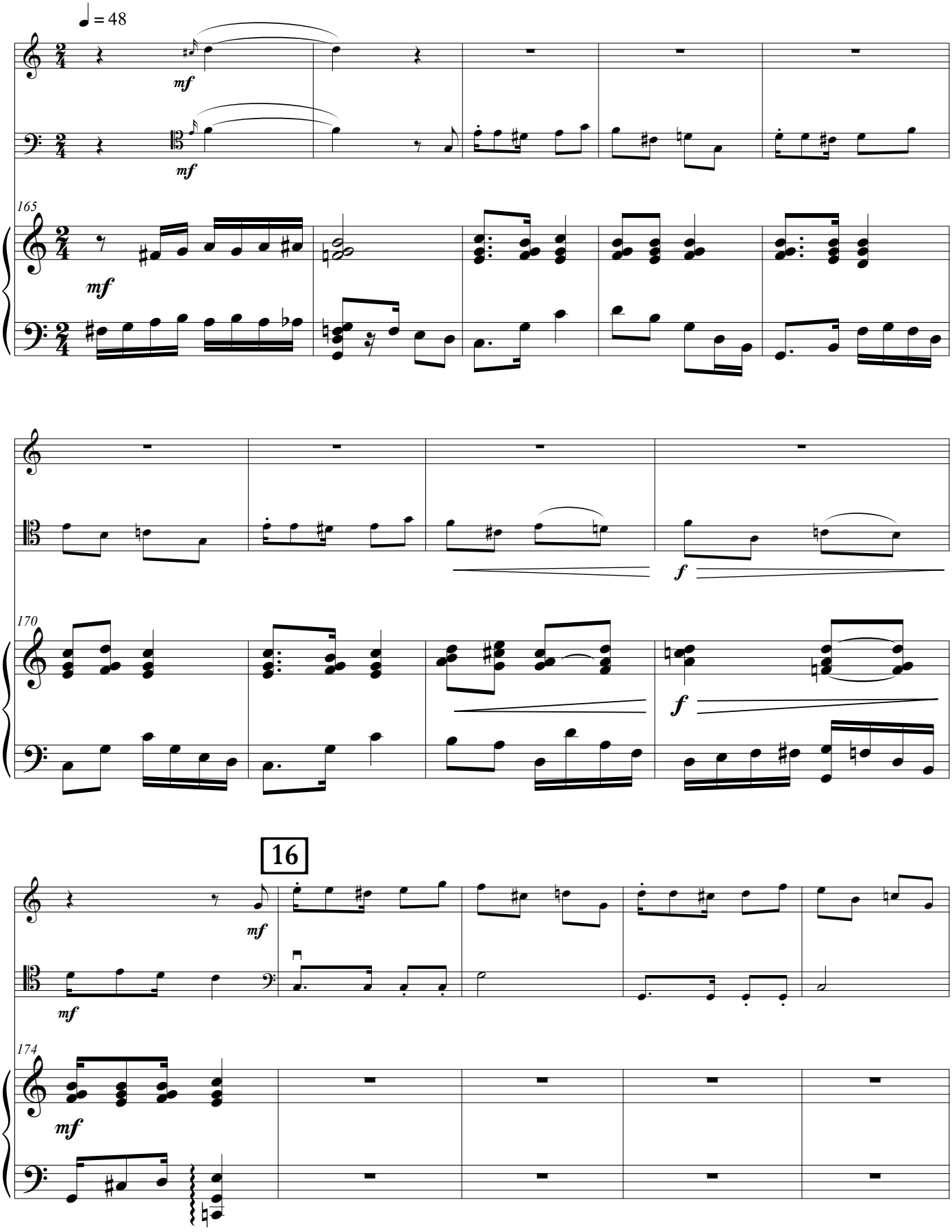
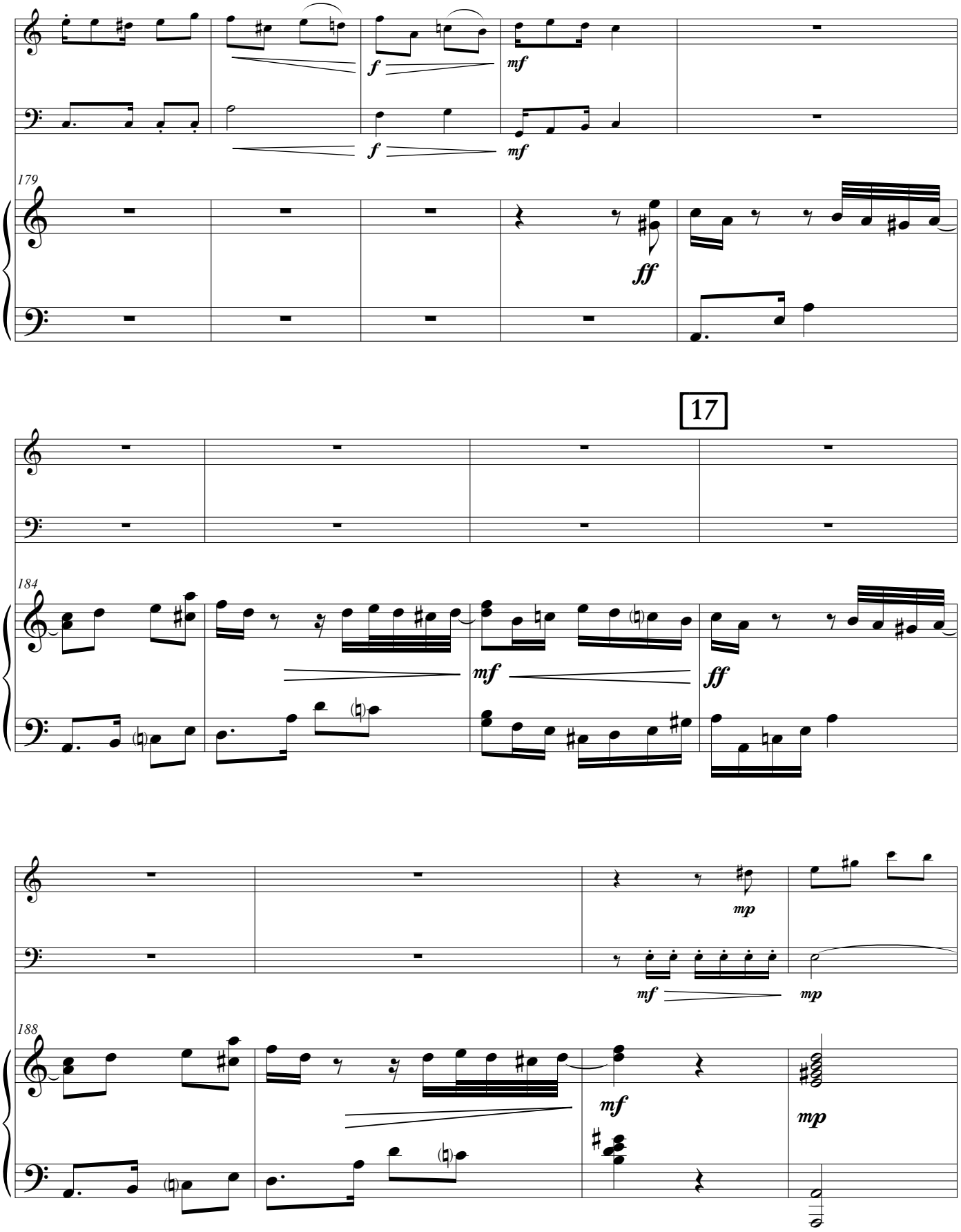
to Hal Janks

# 2. Havanaise

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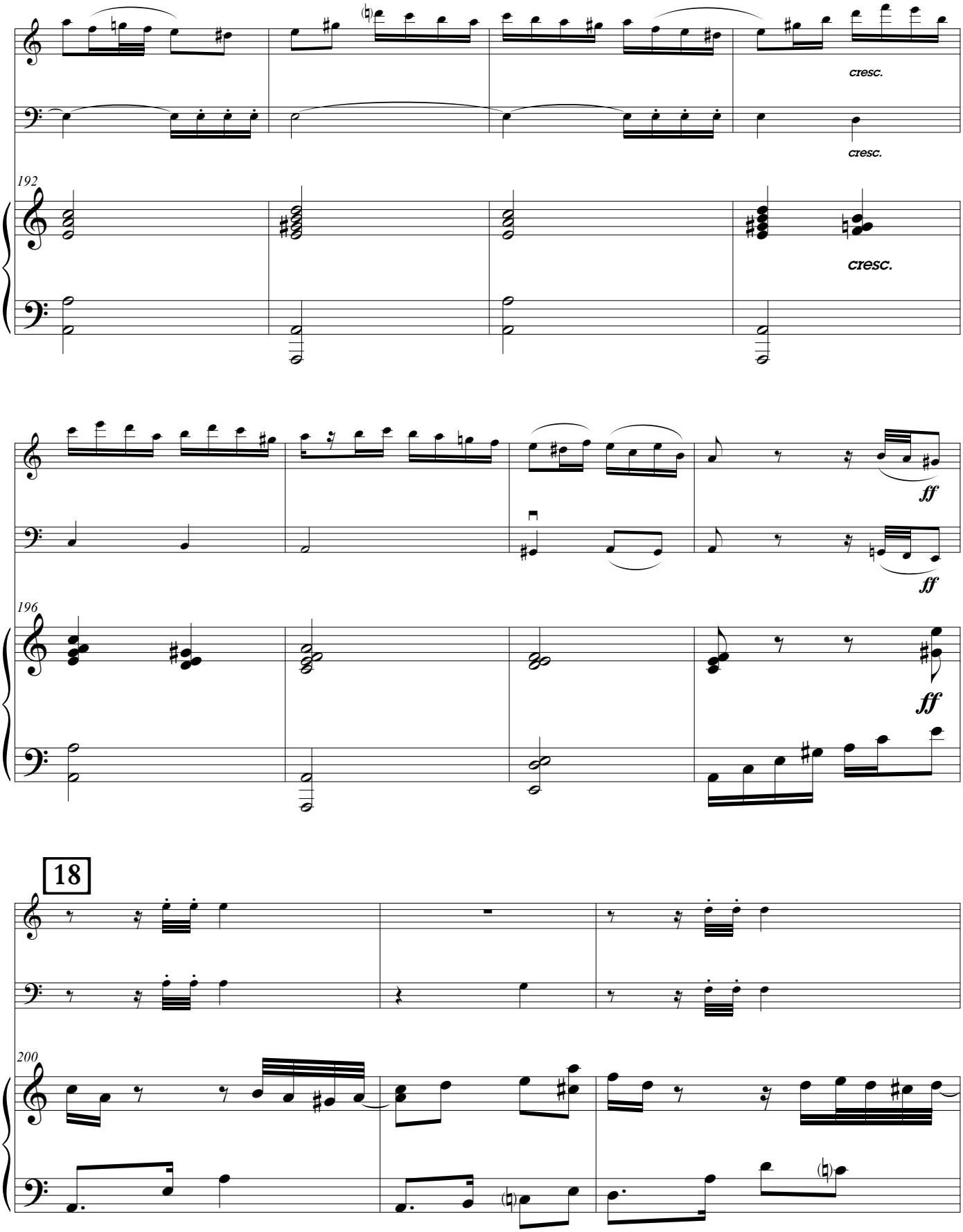
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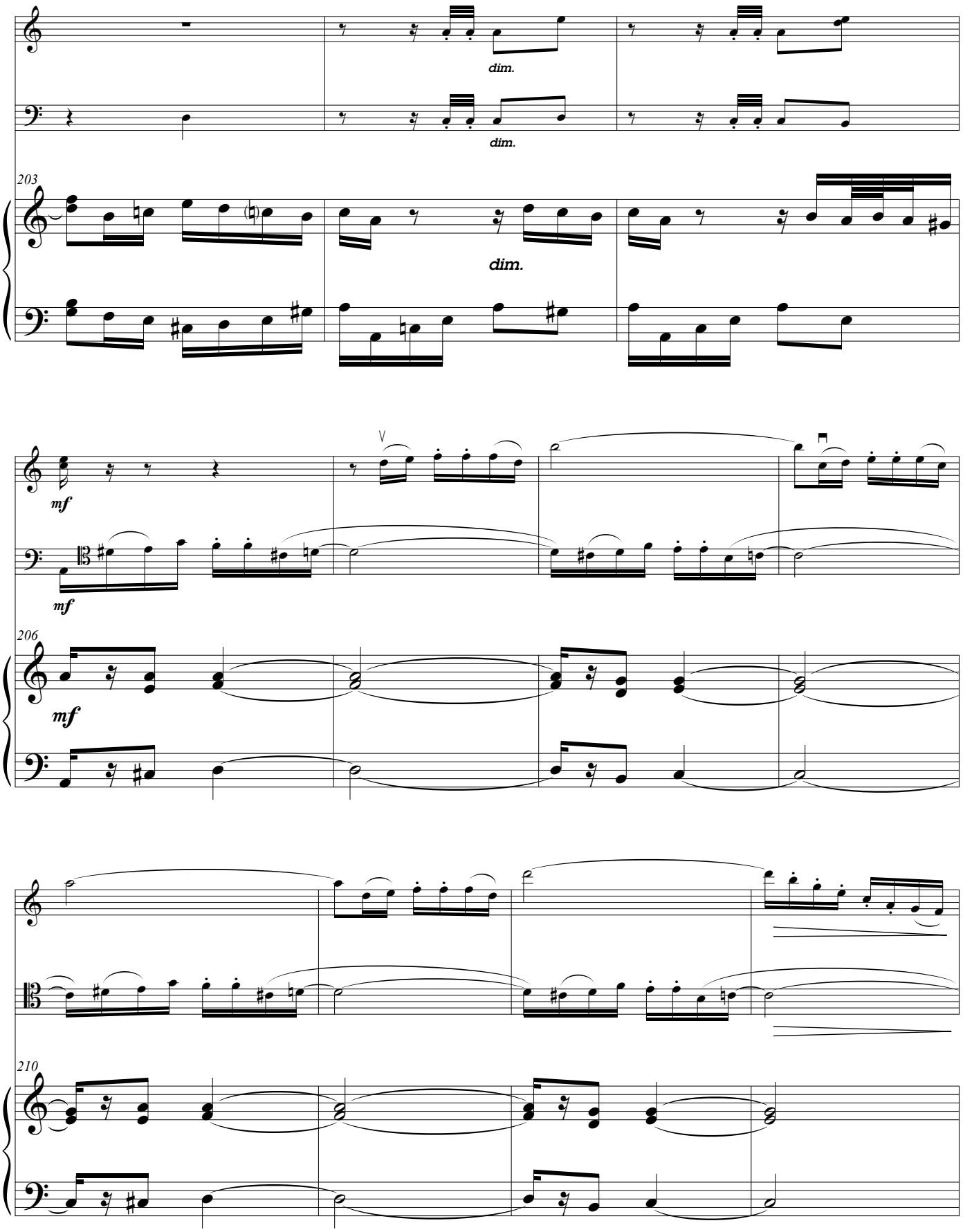
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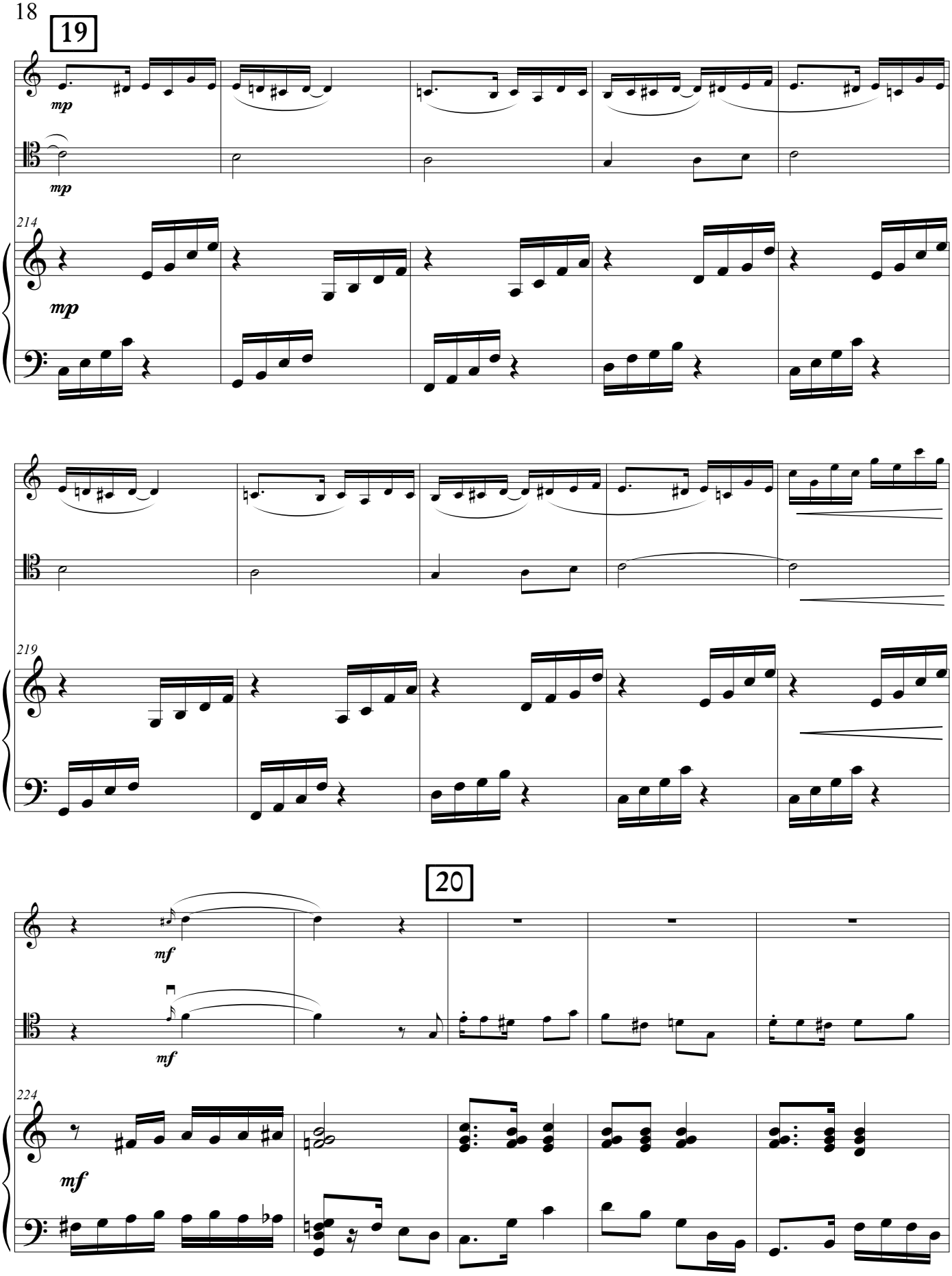
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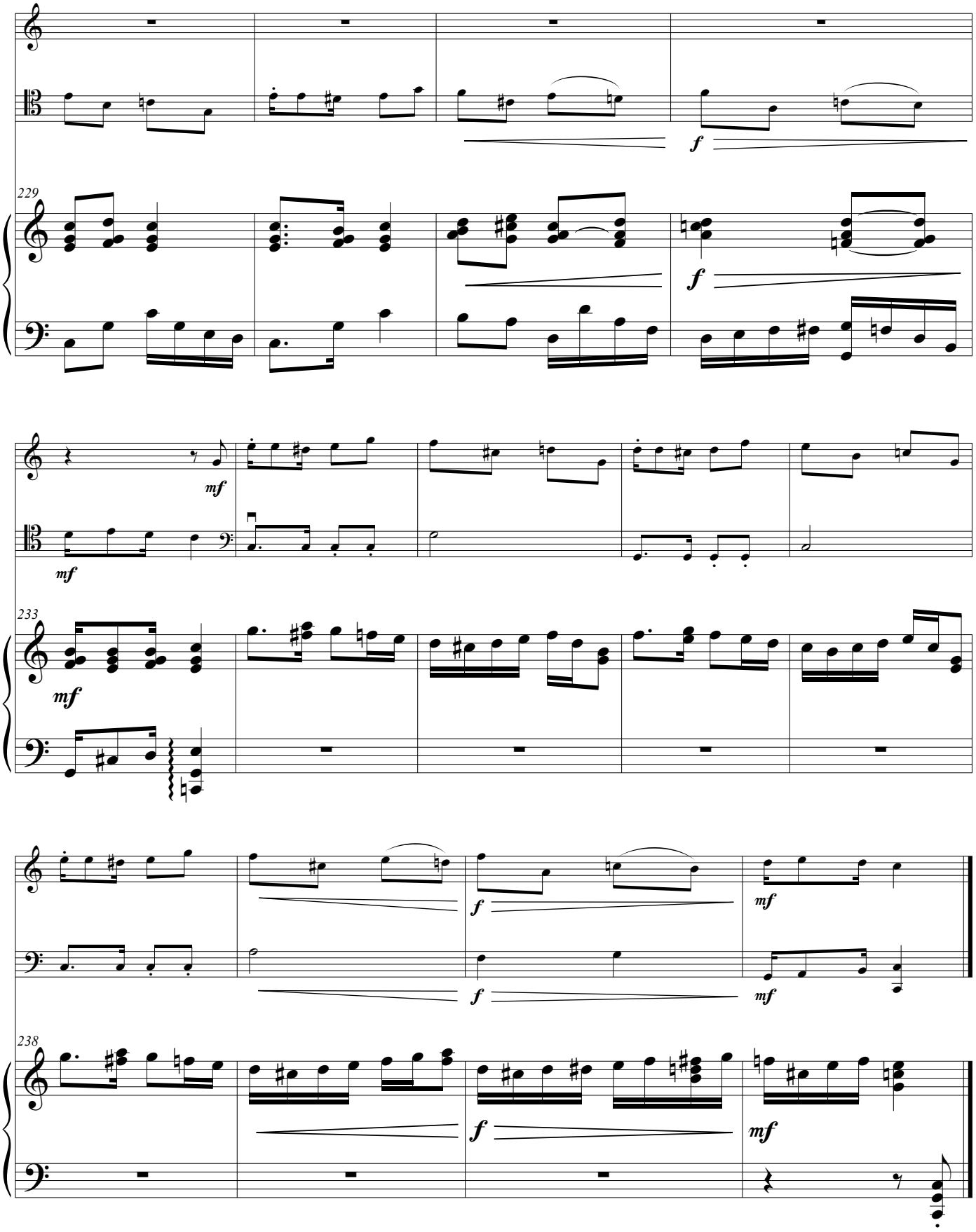
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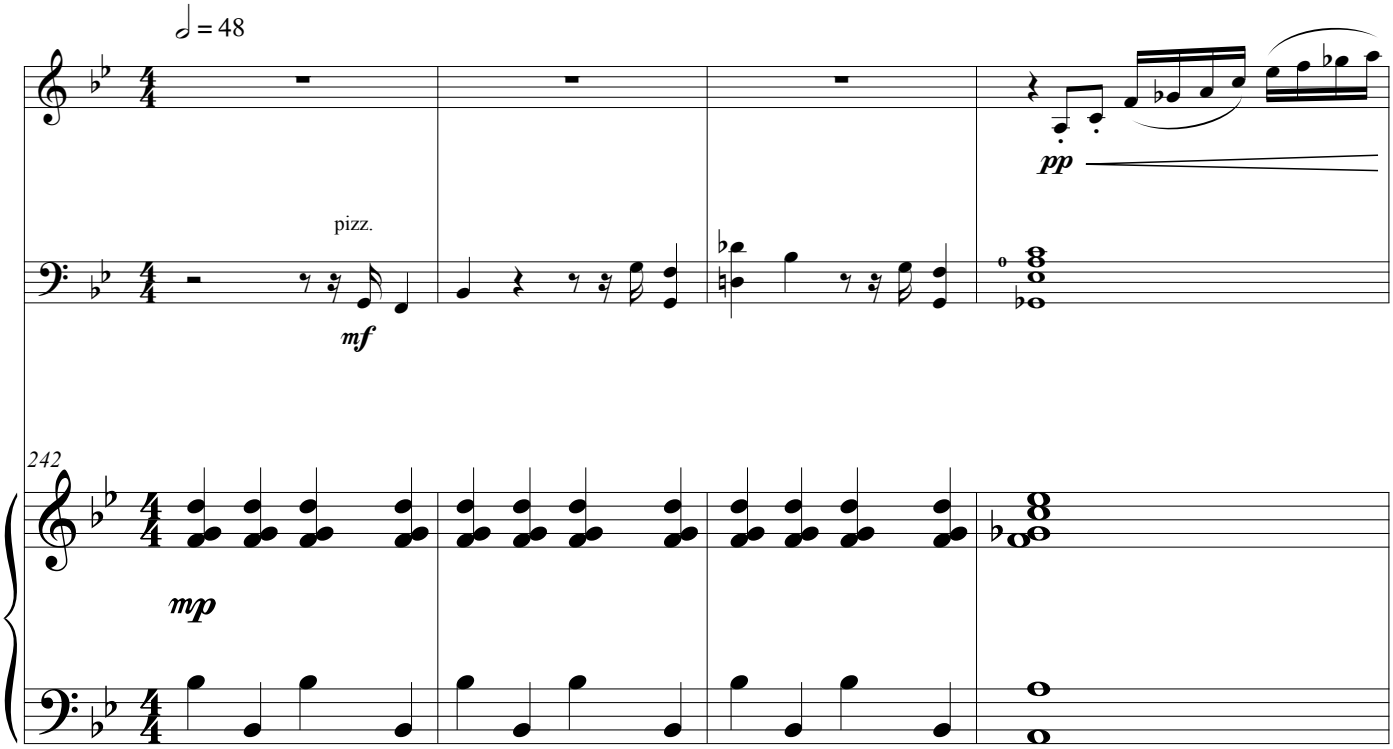


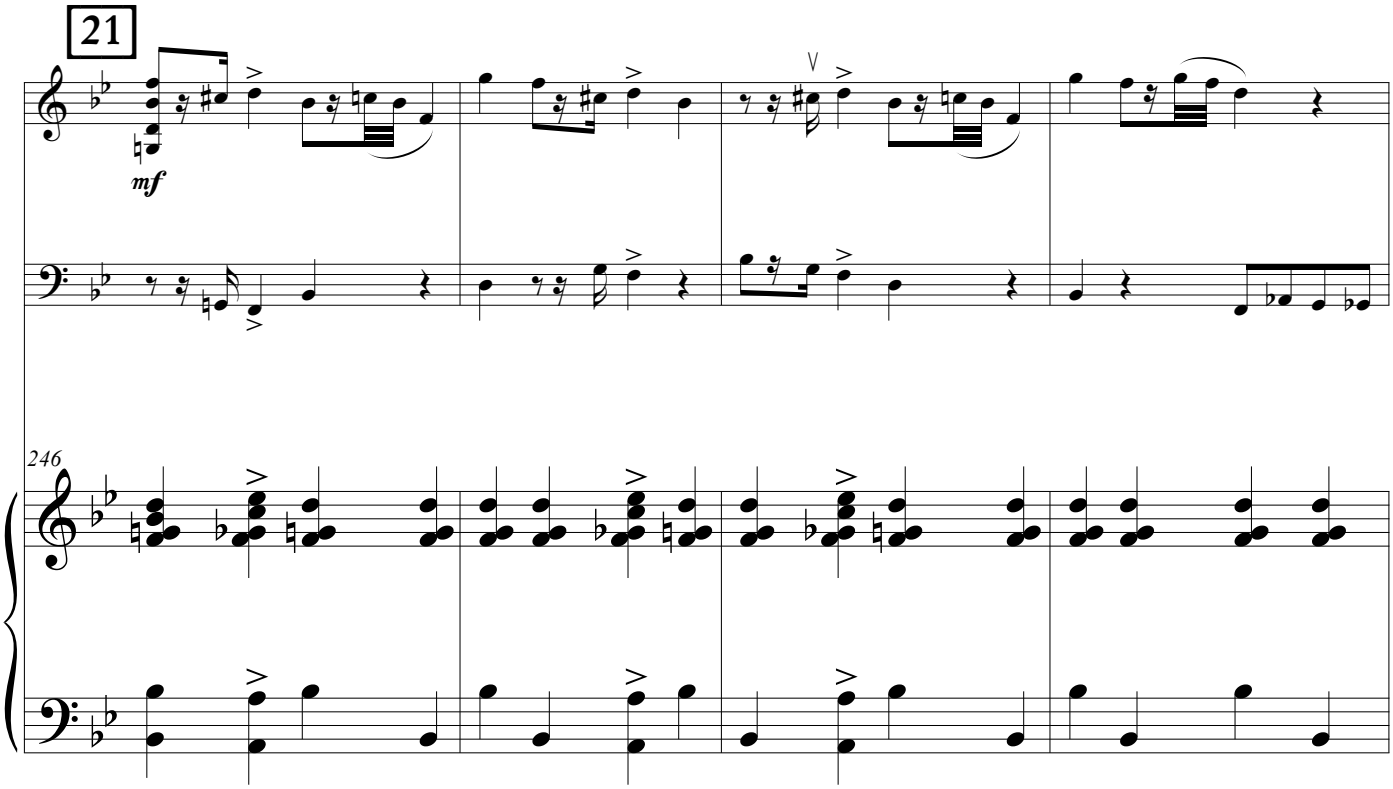

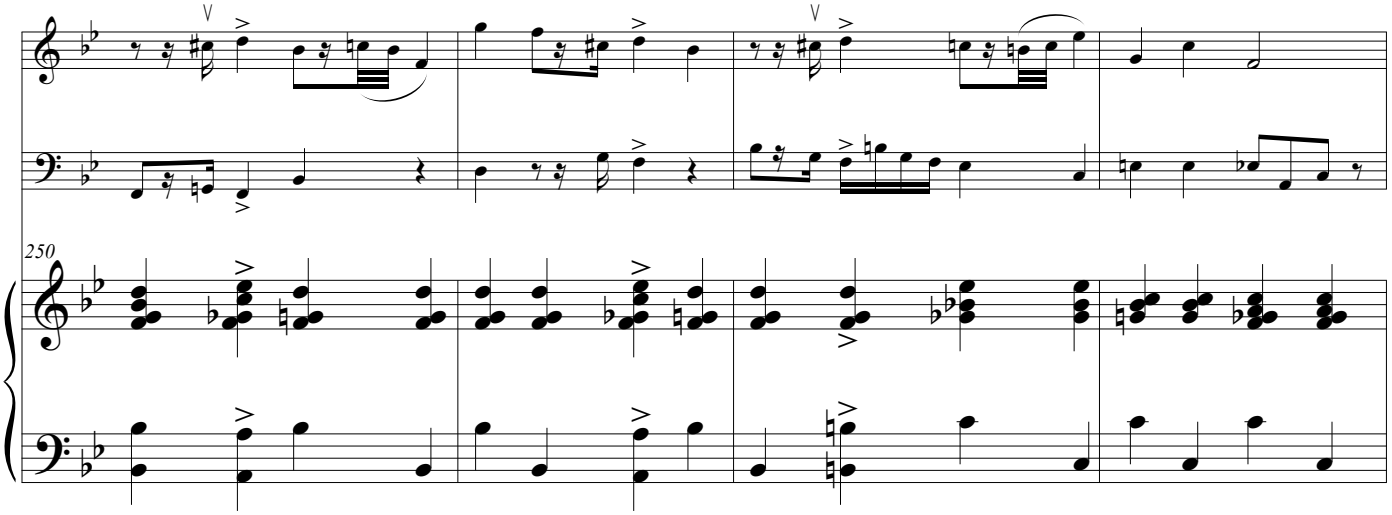
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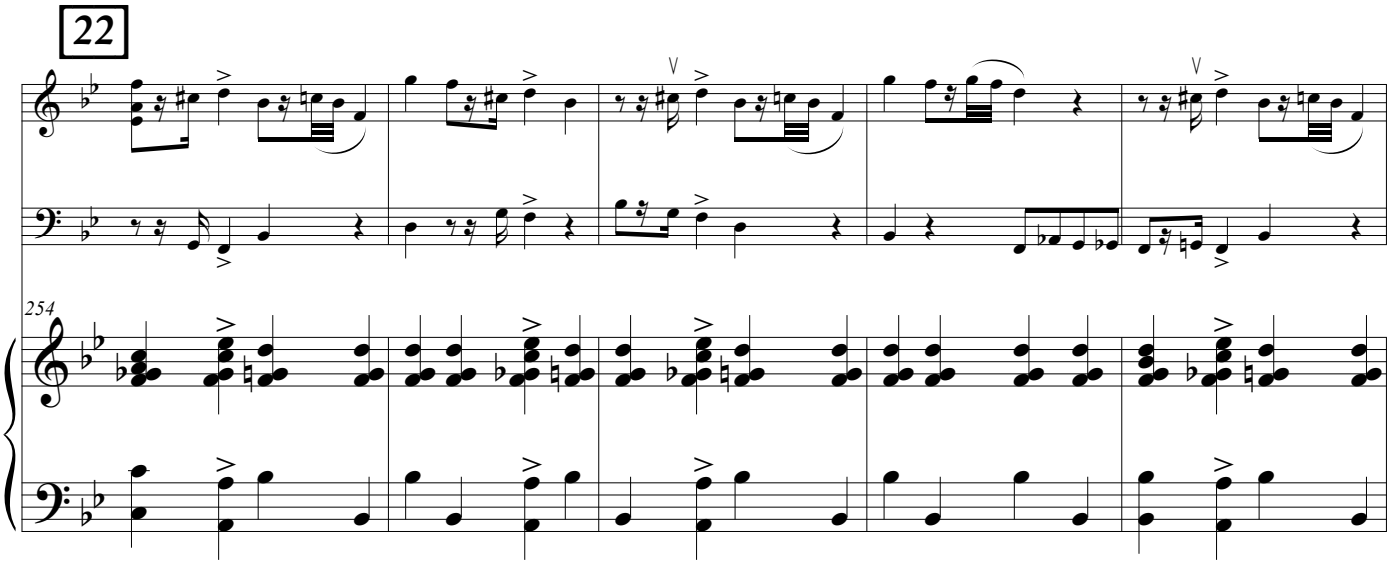
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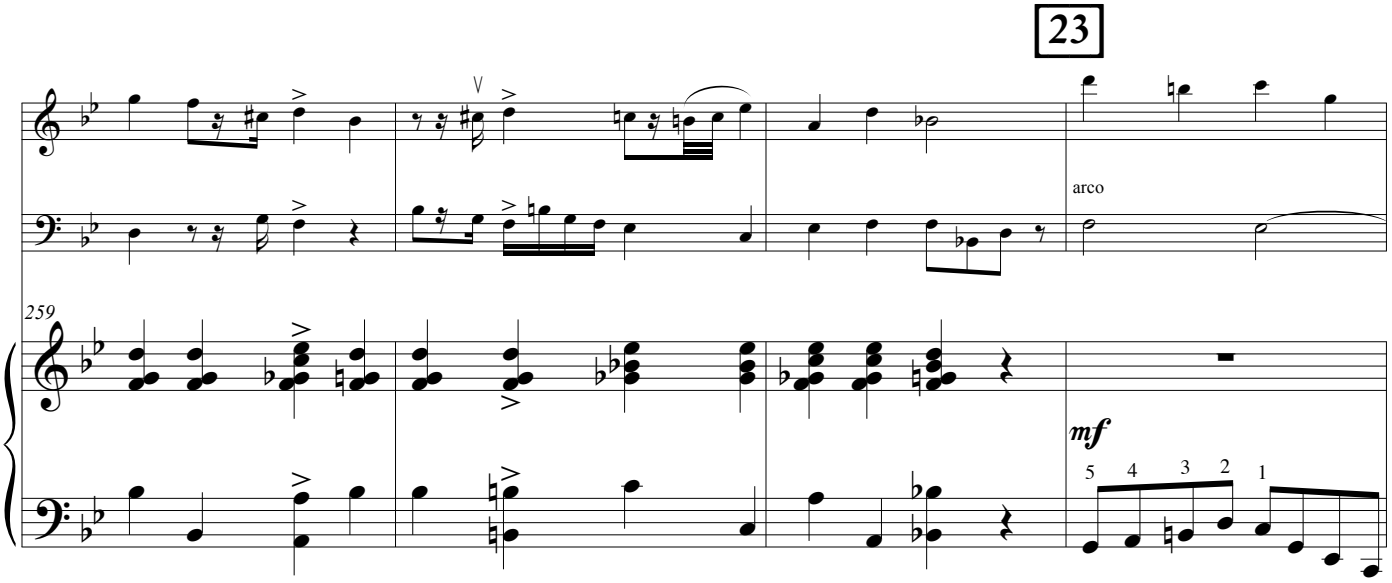
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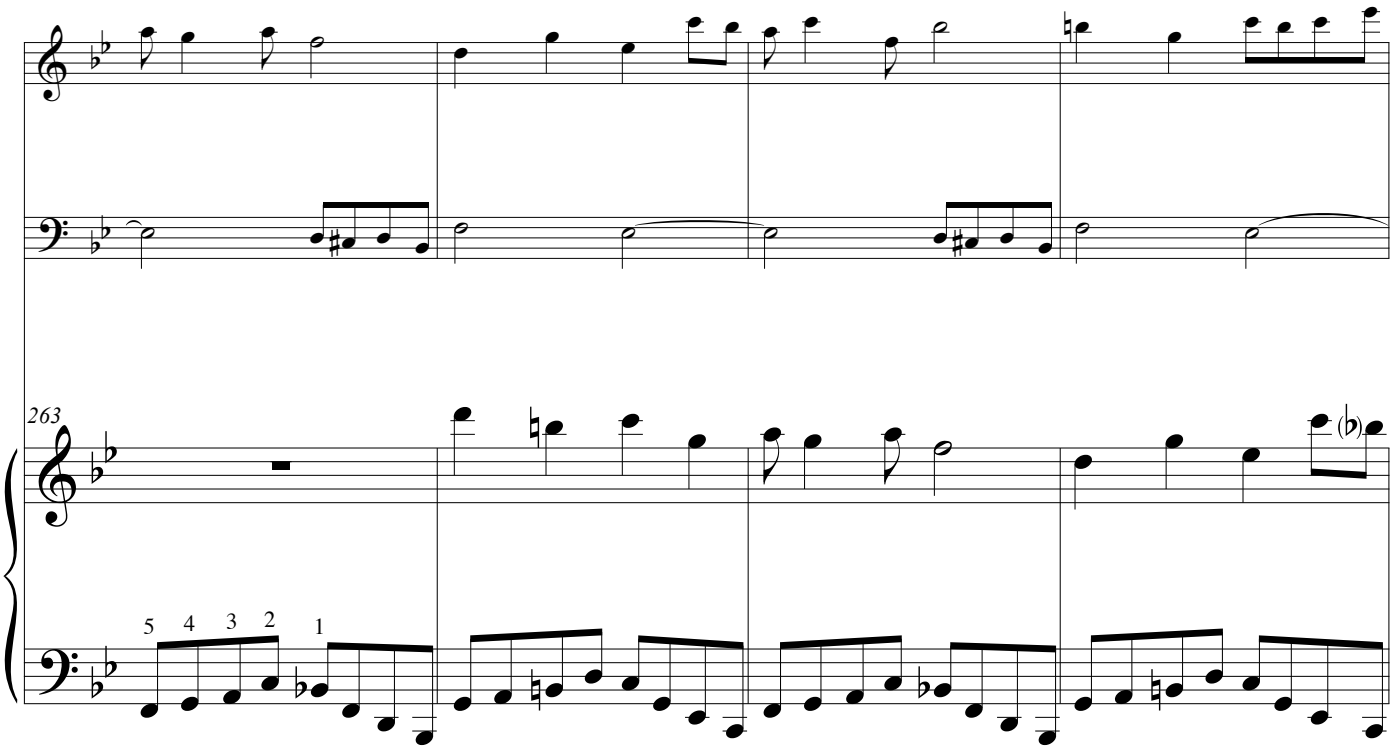

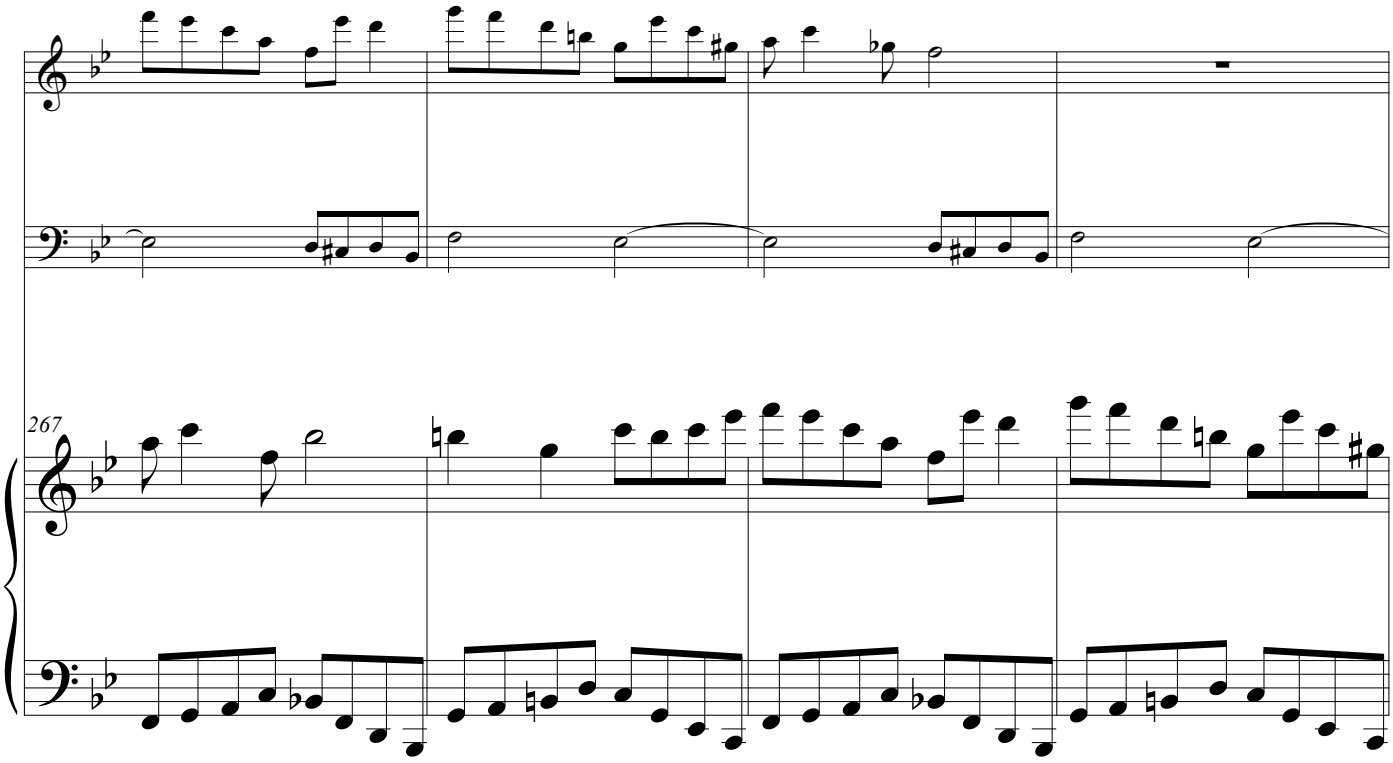

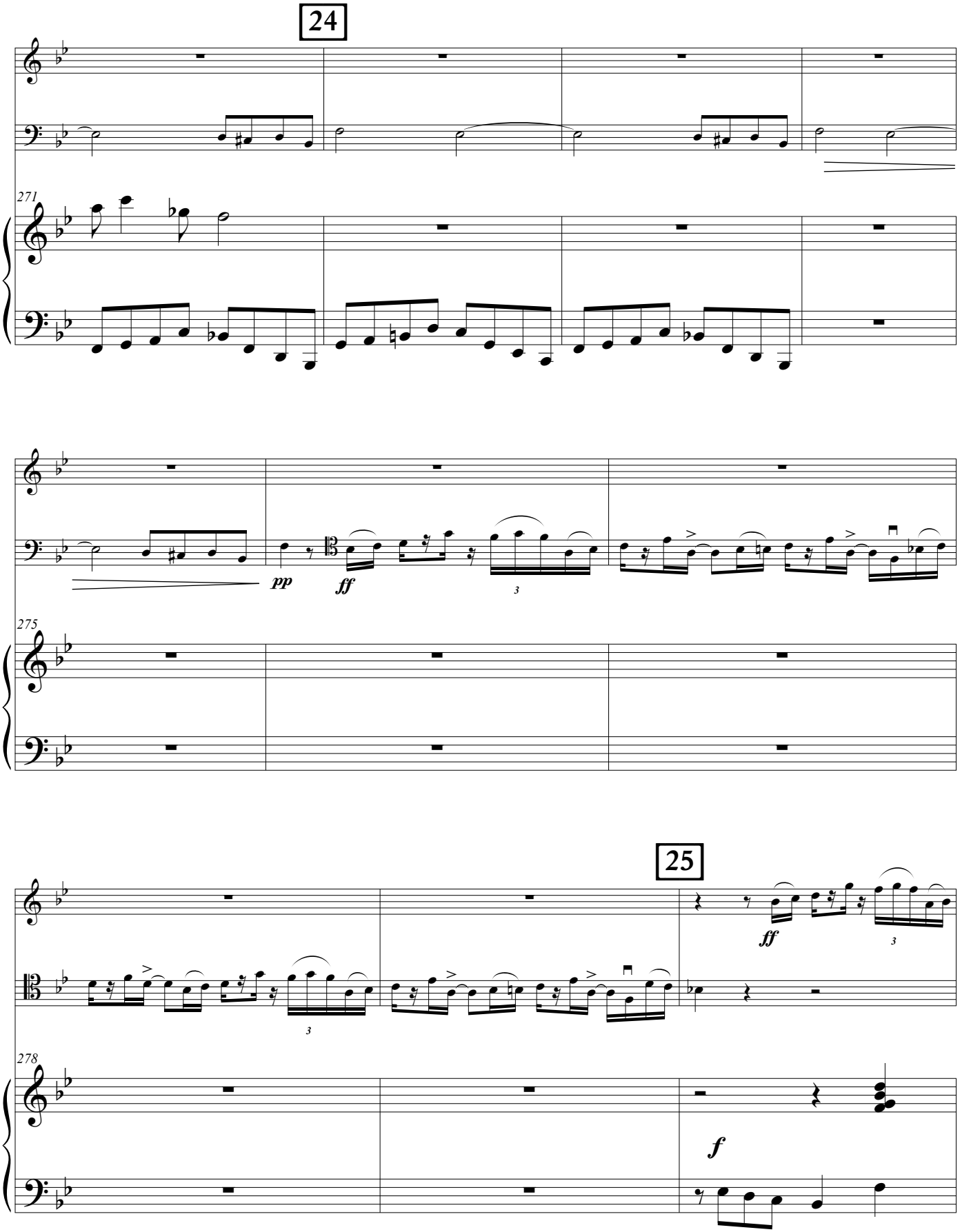
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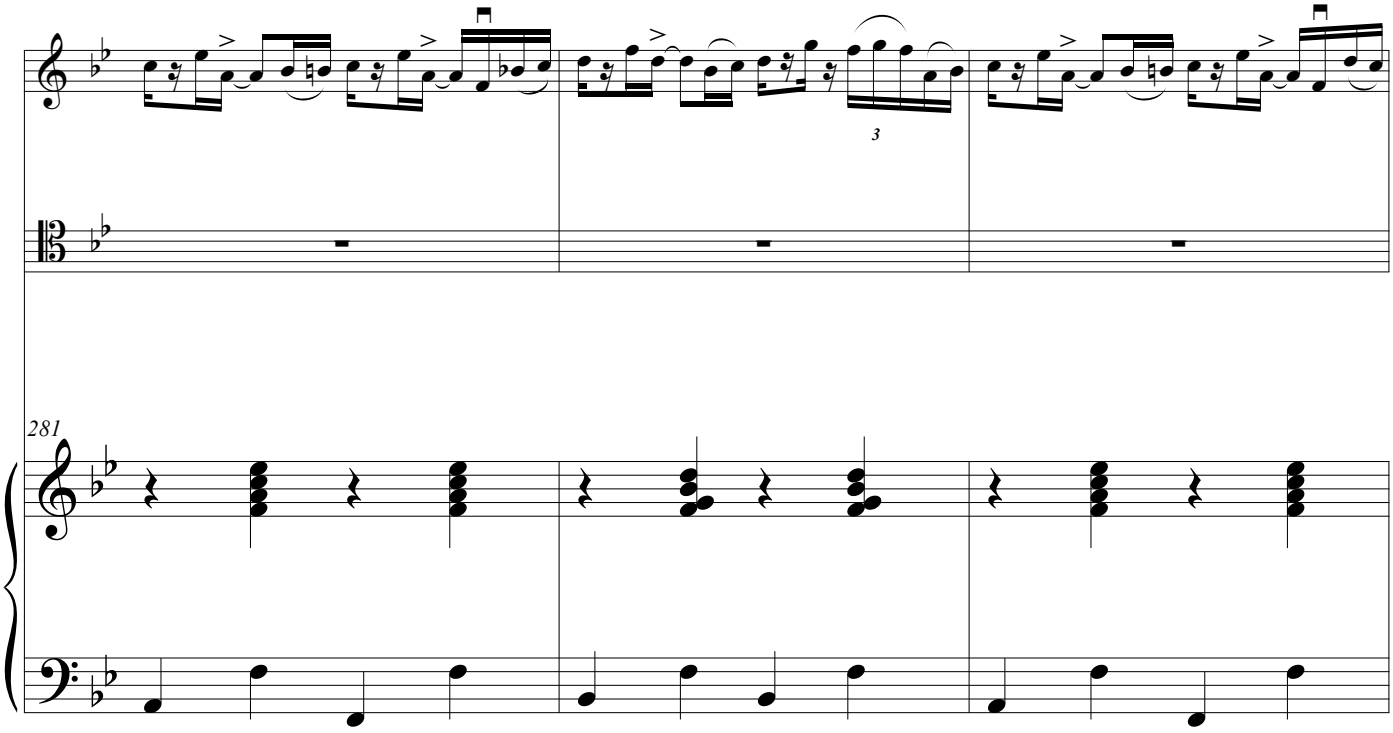
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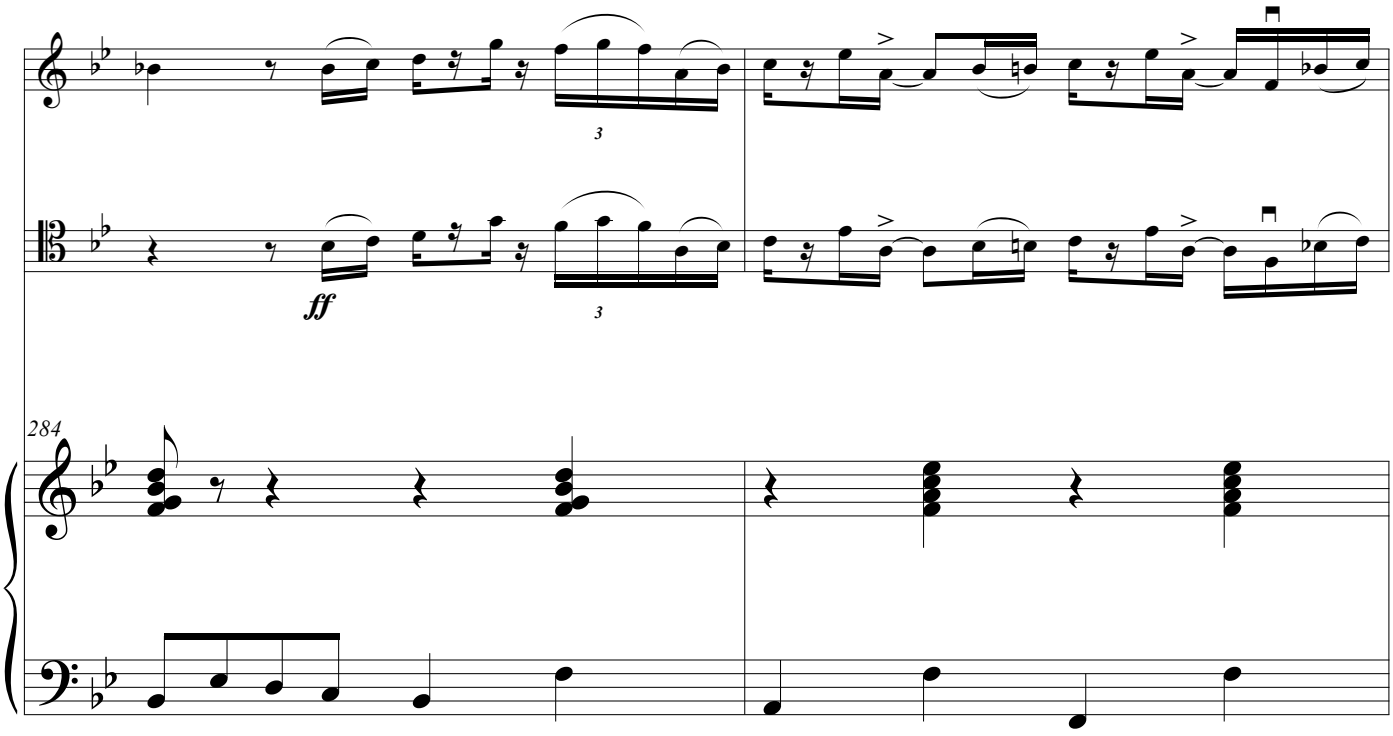
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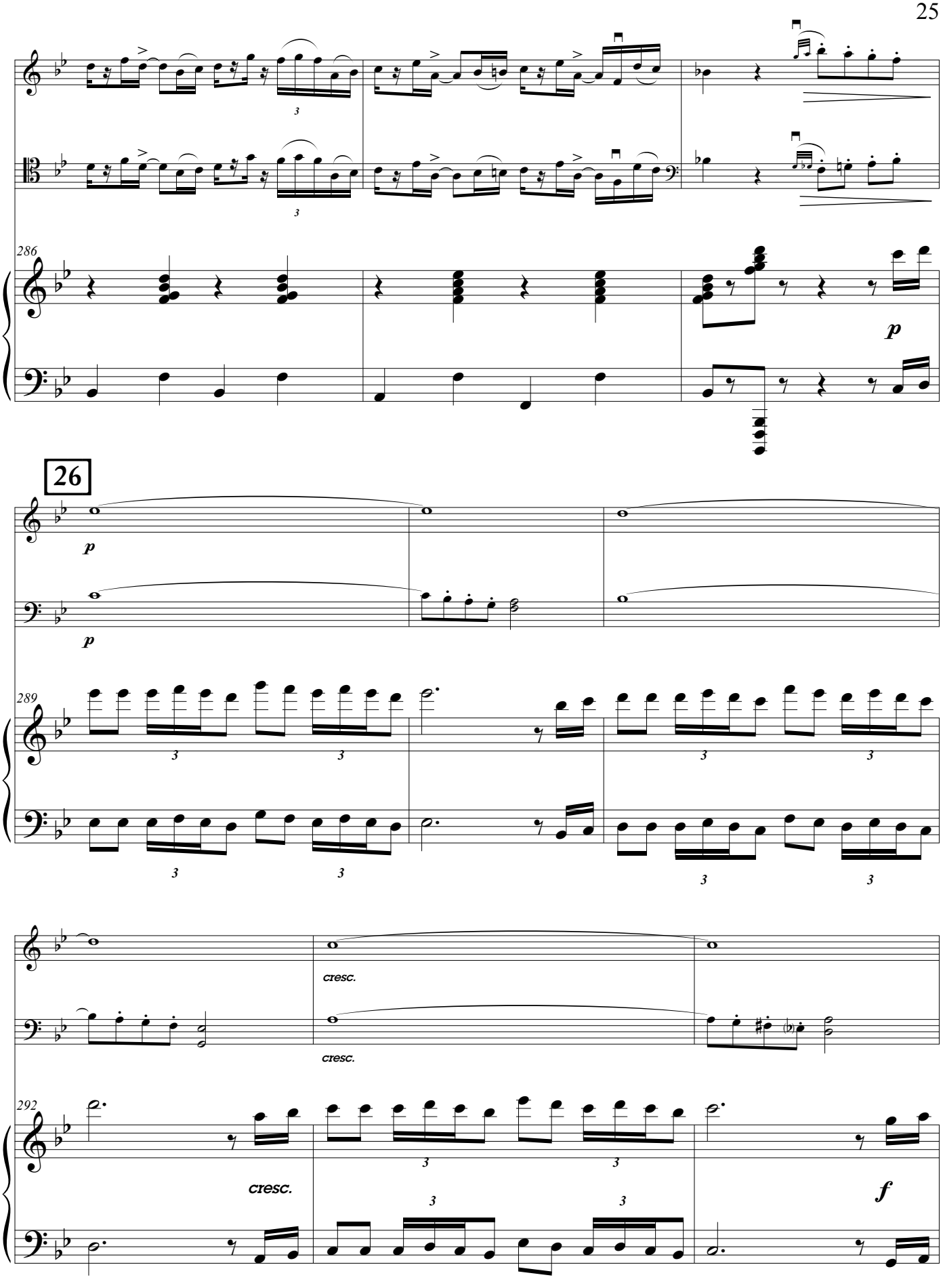
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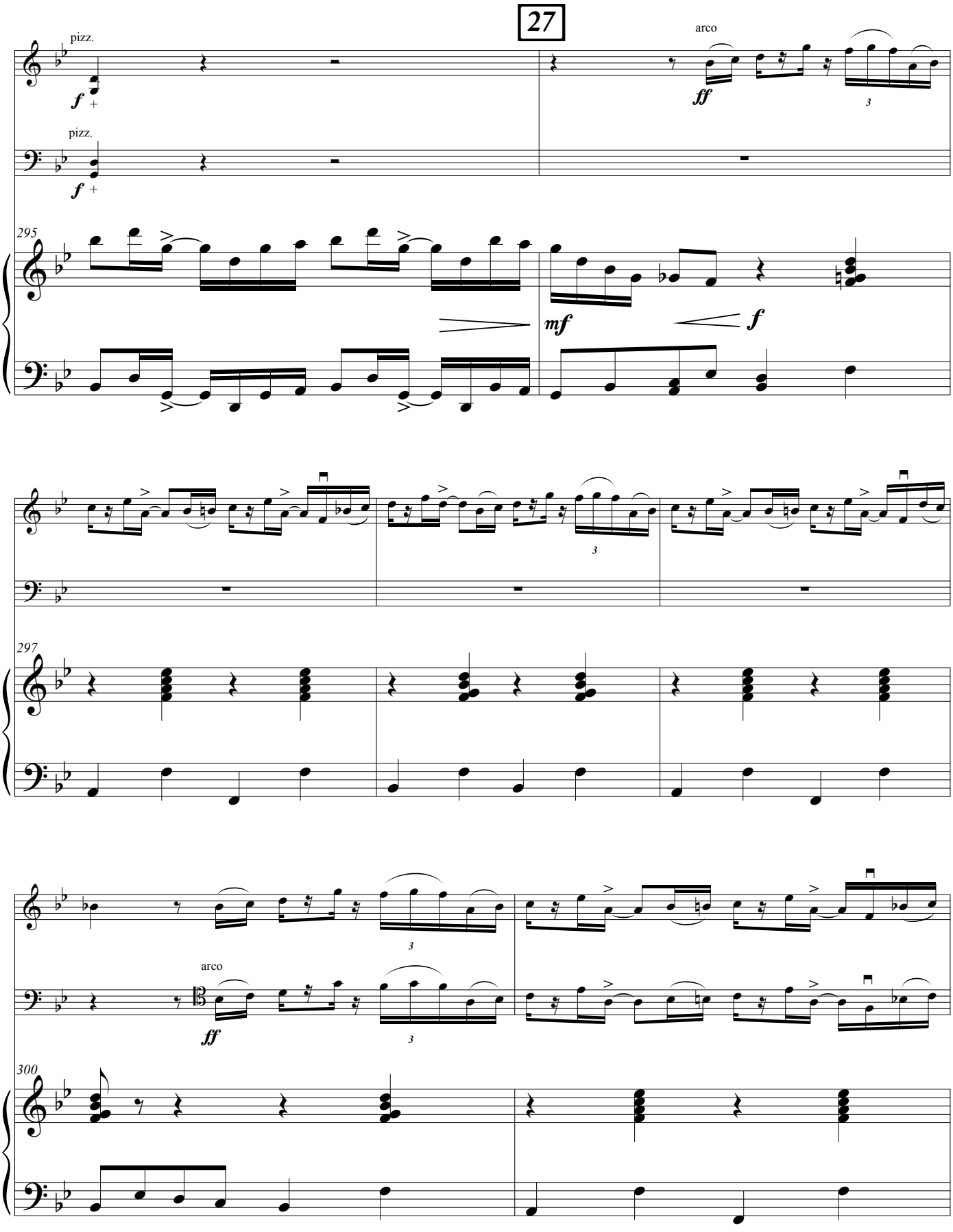
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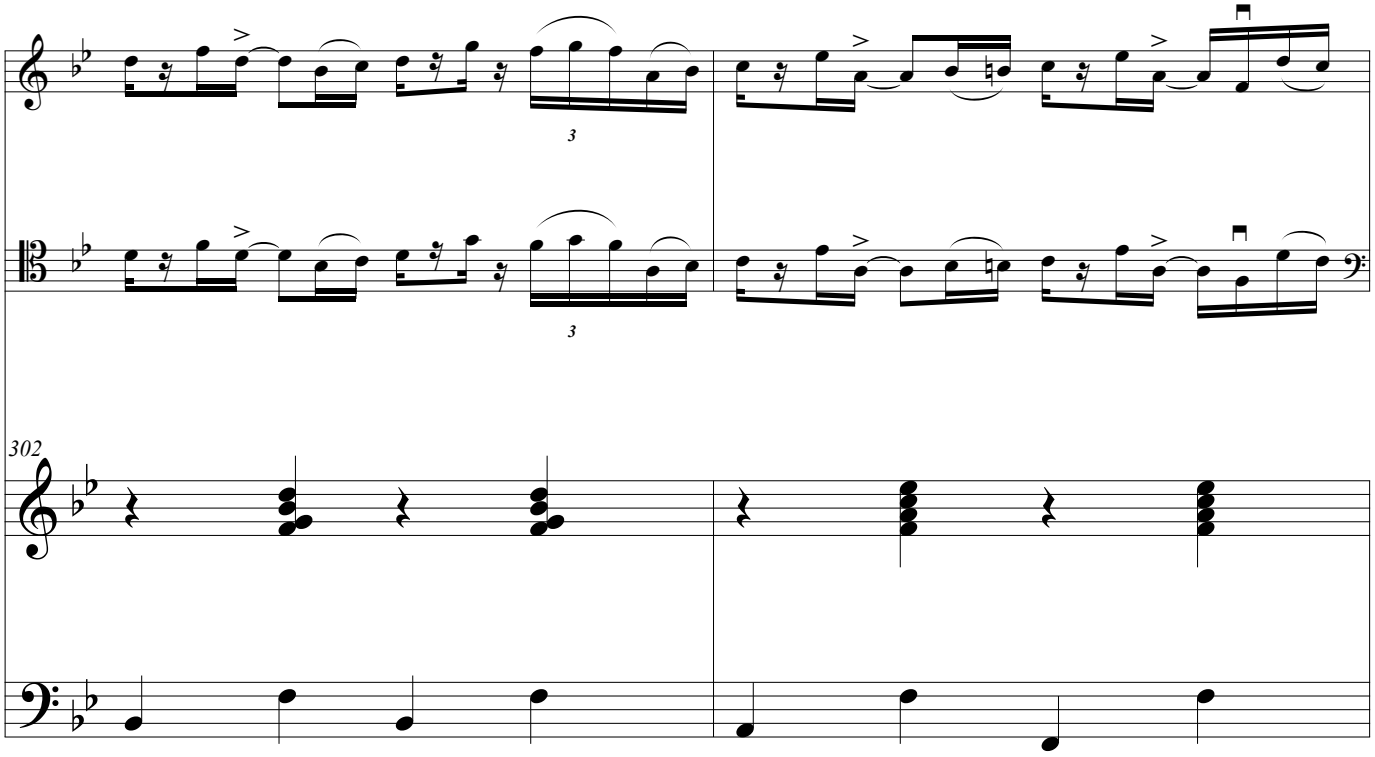
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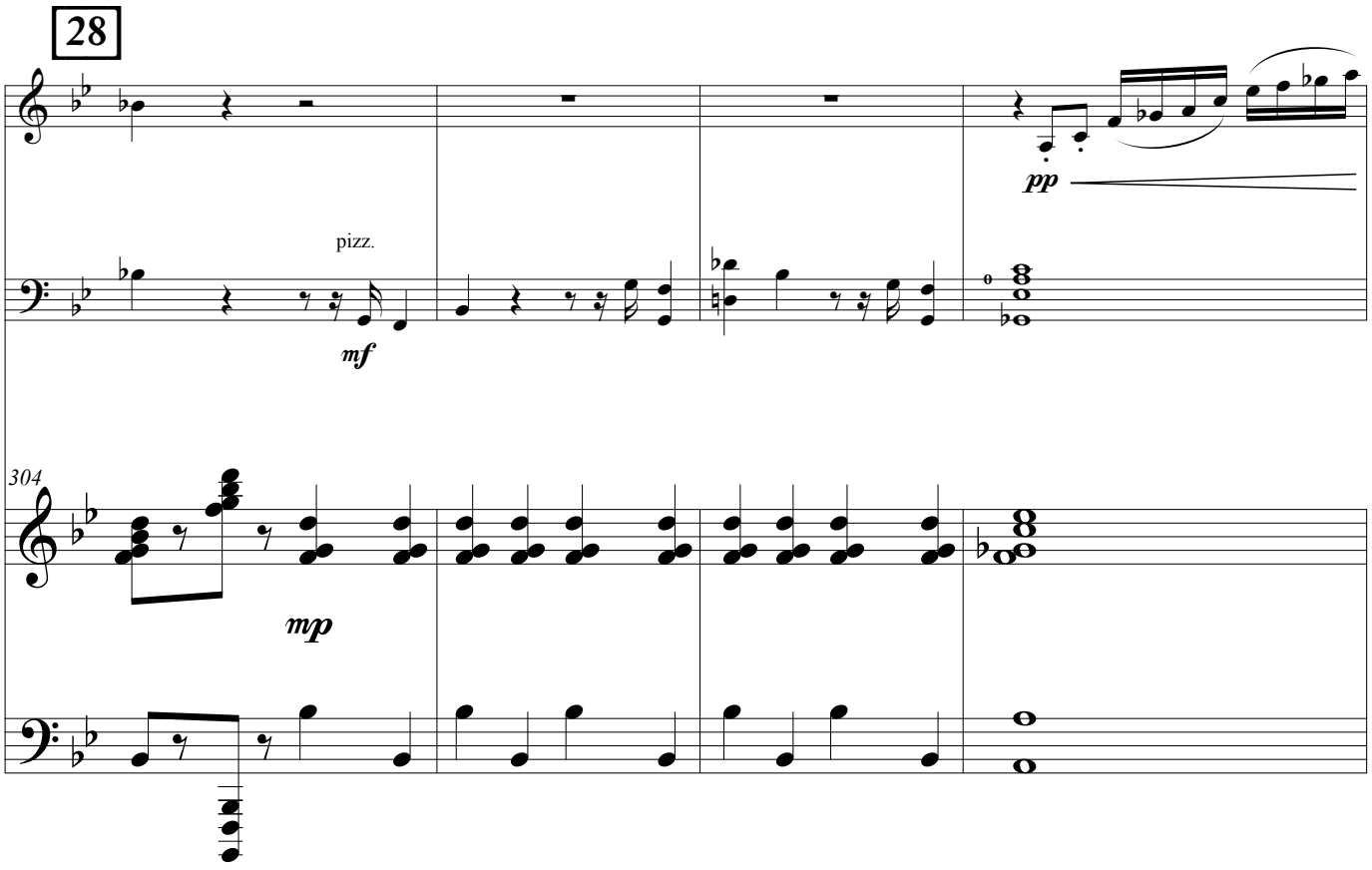
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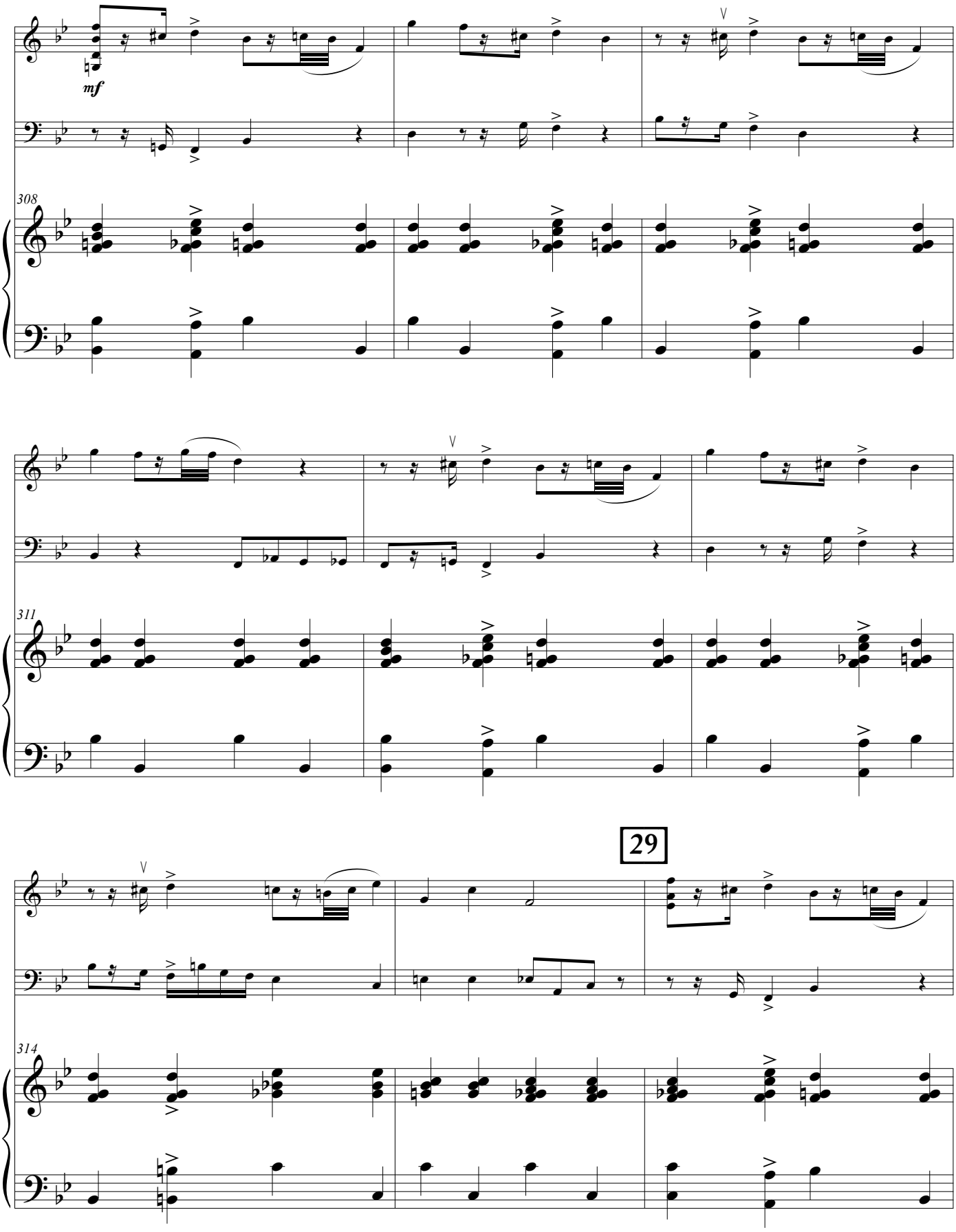
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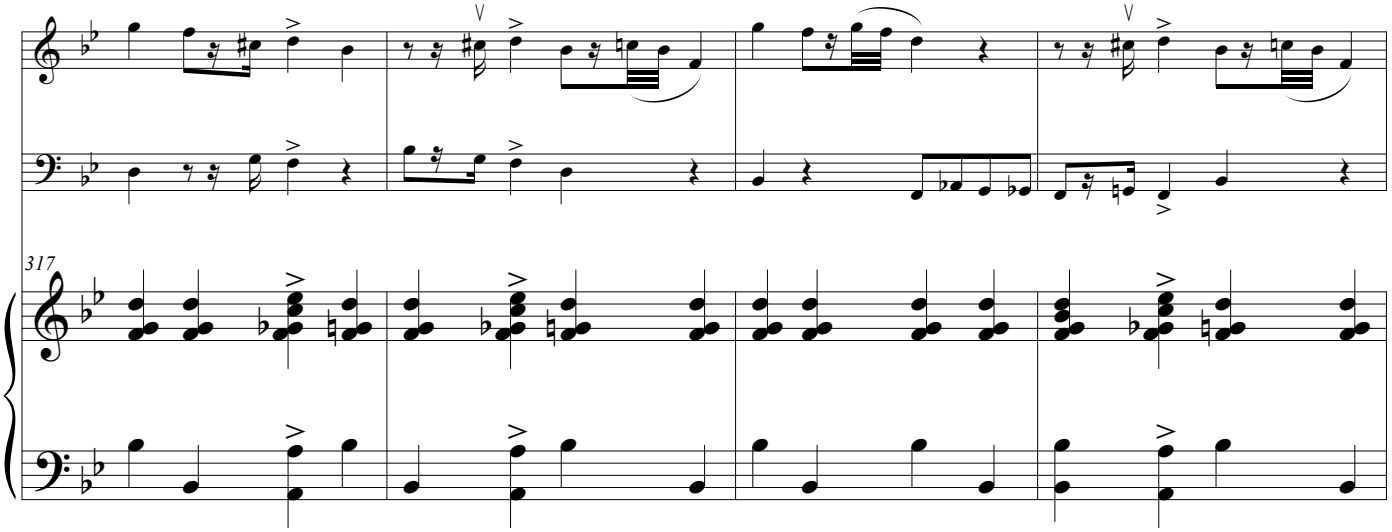
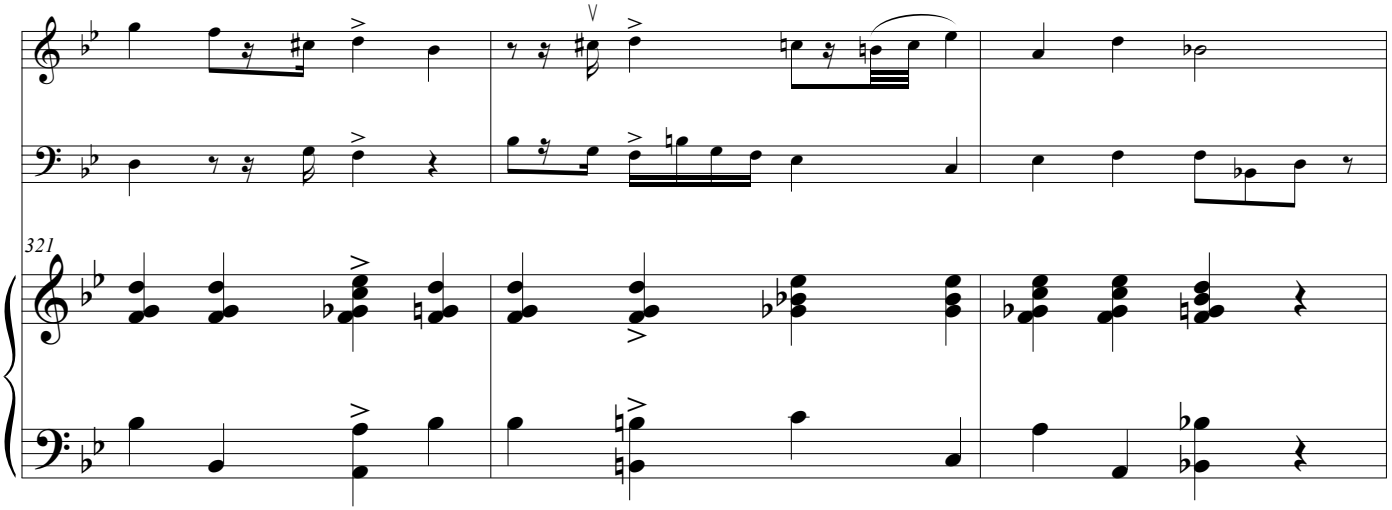
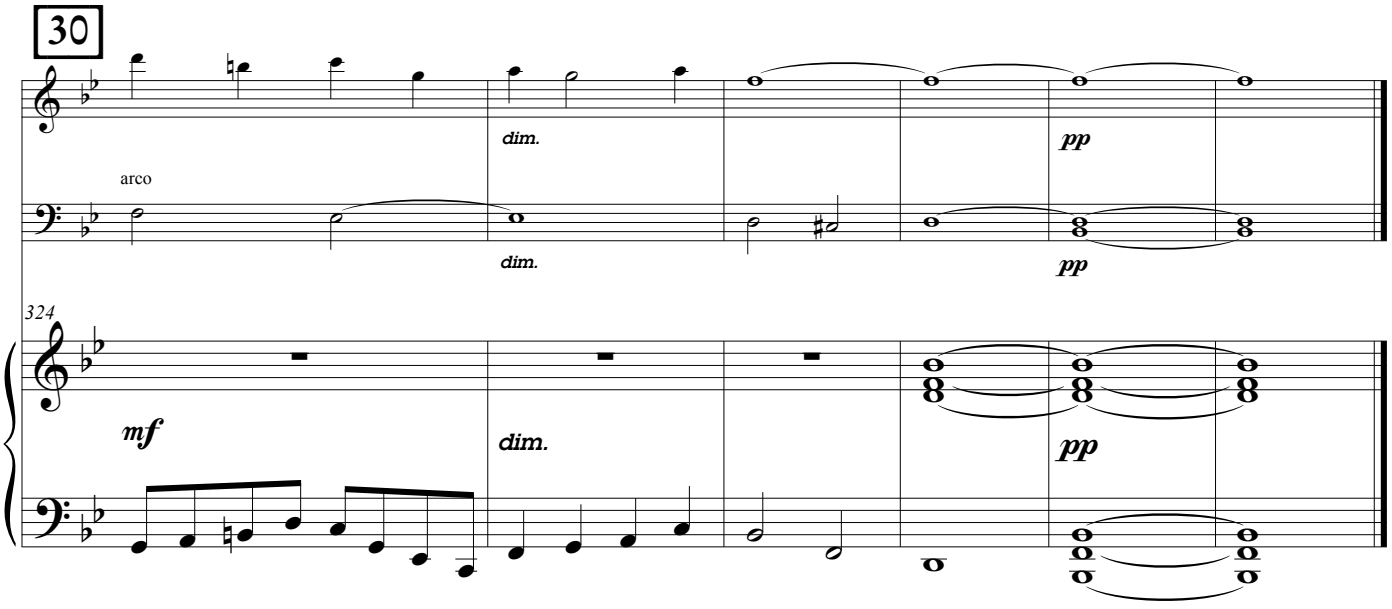
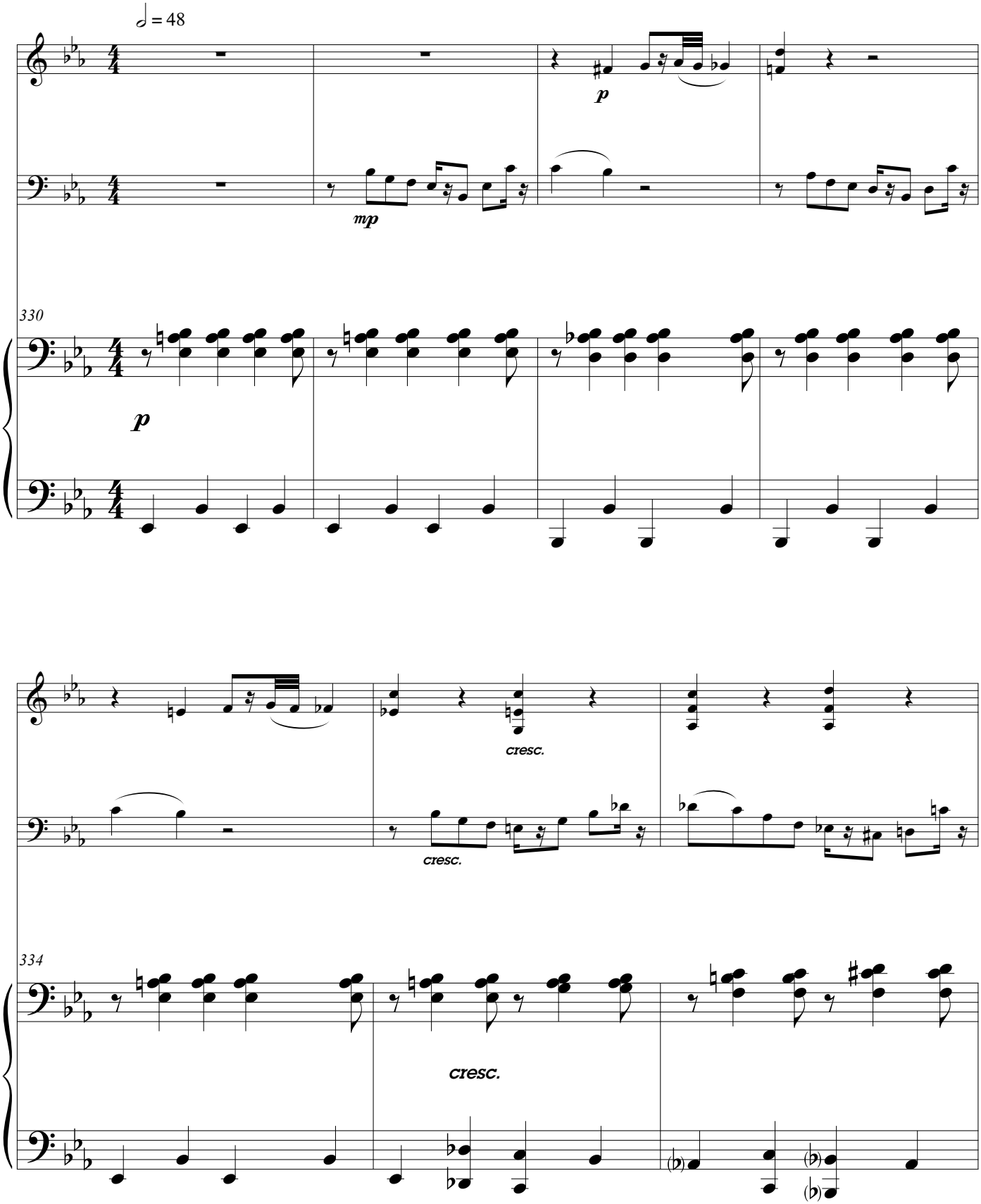


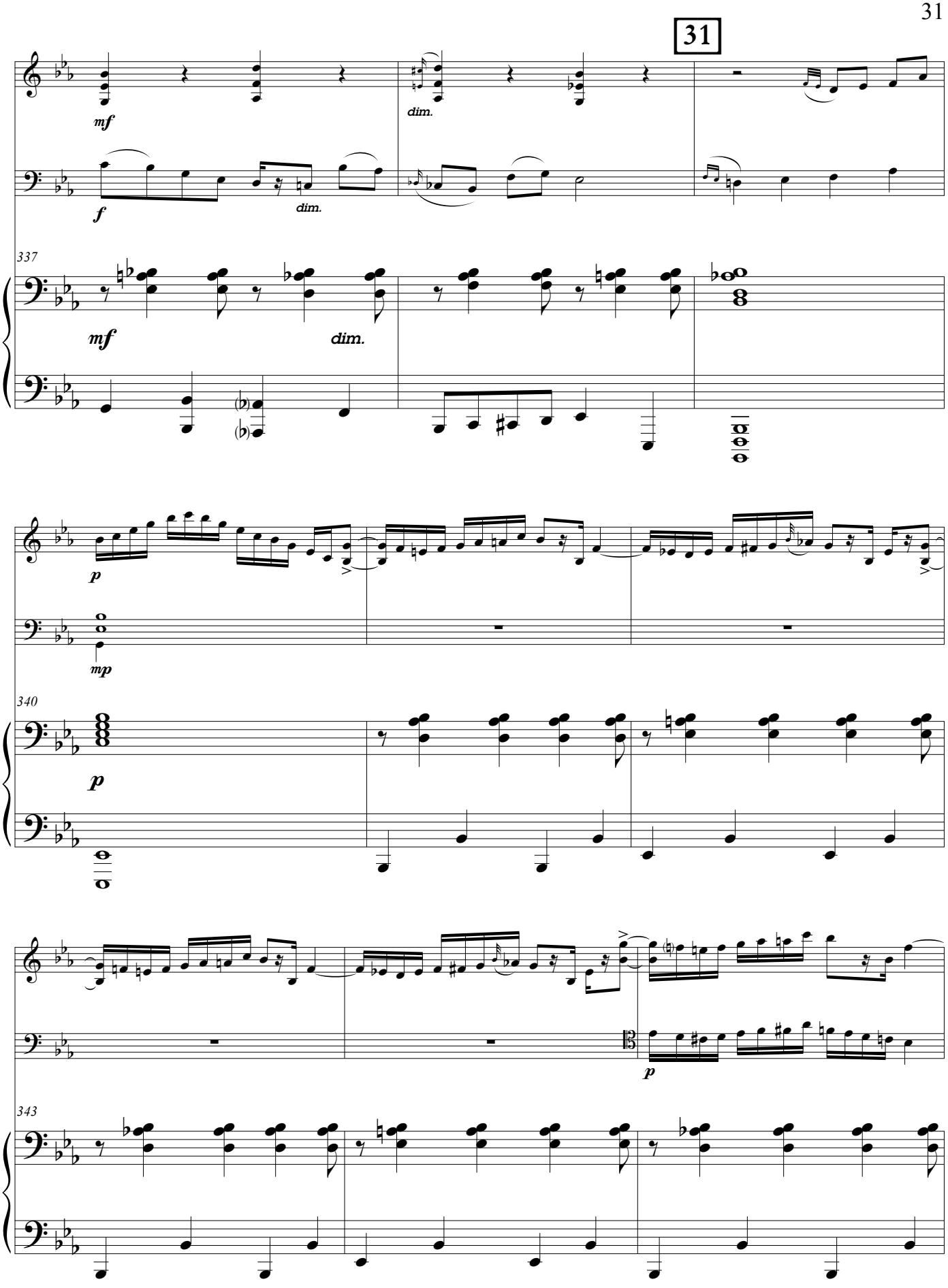




to Jon Klibonoff

# 4. Dyngus Day

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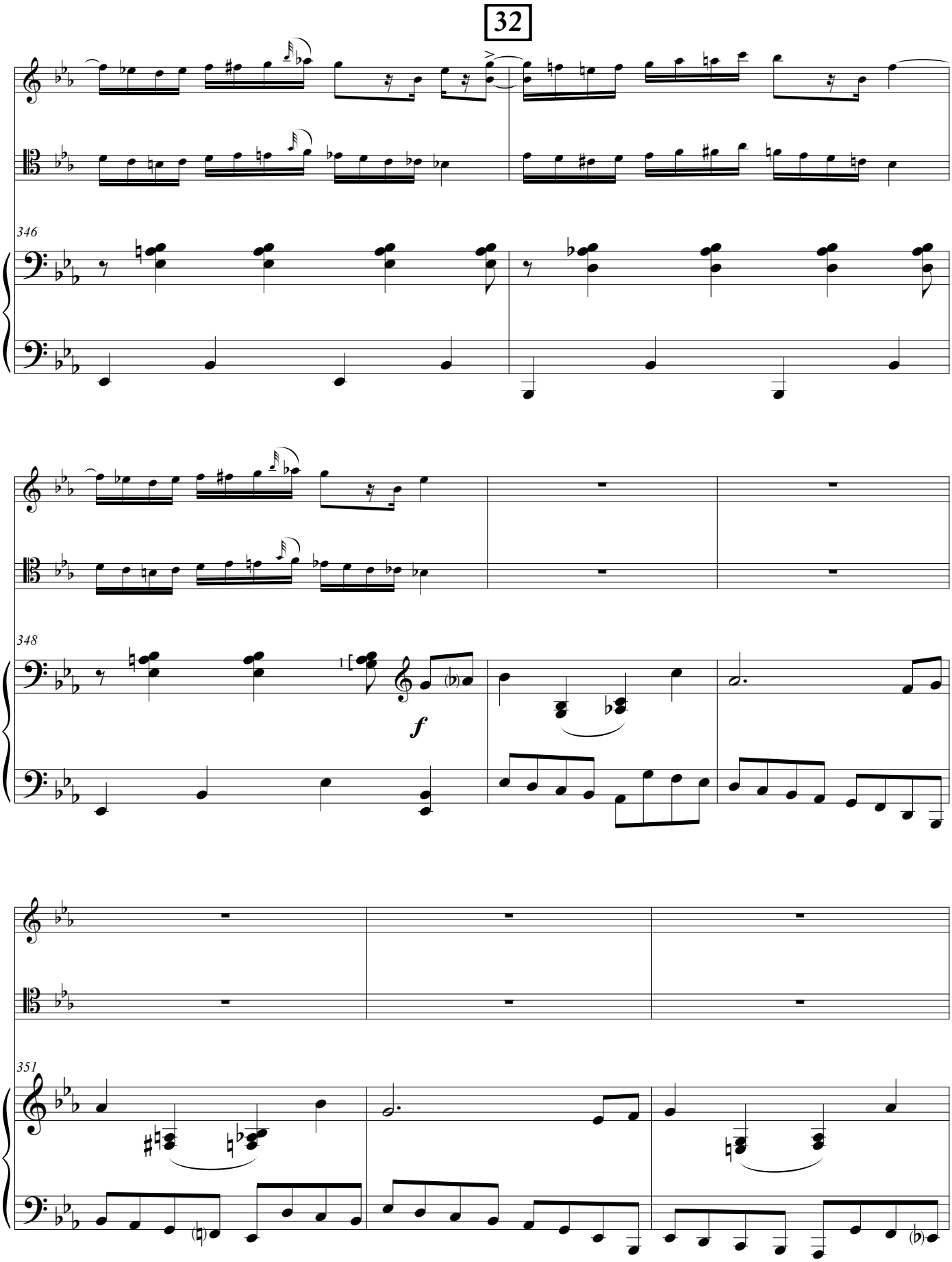
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346
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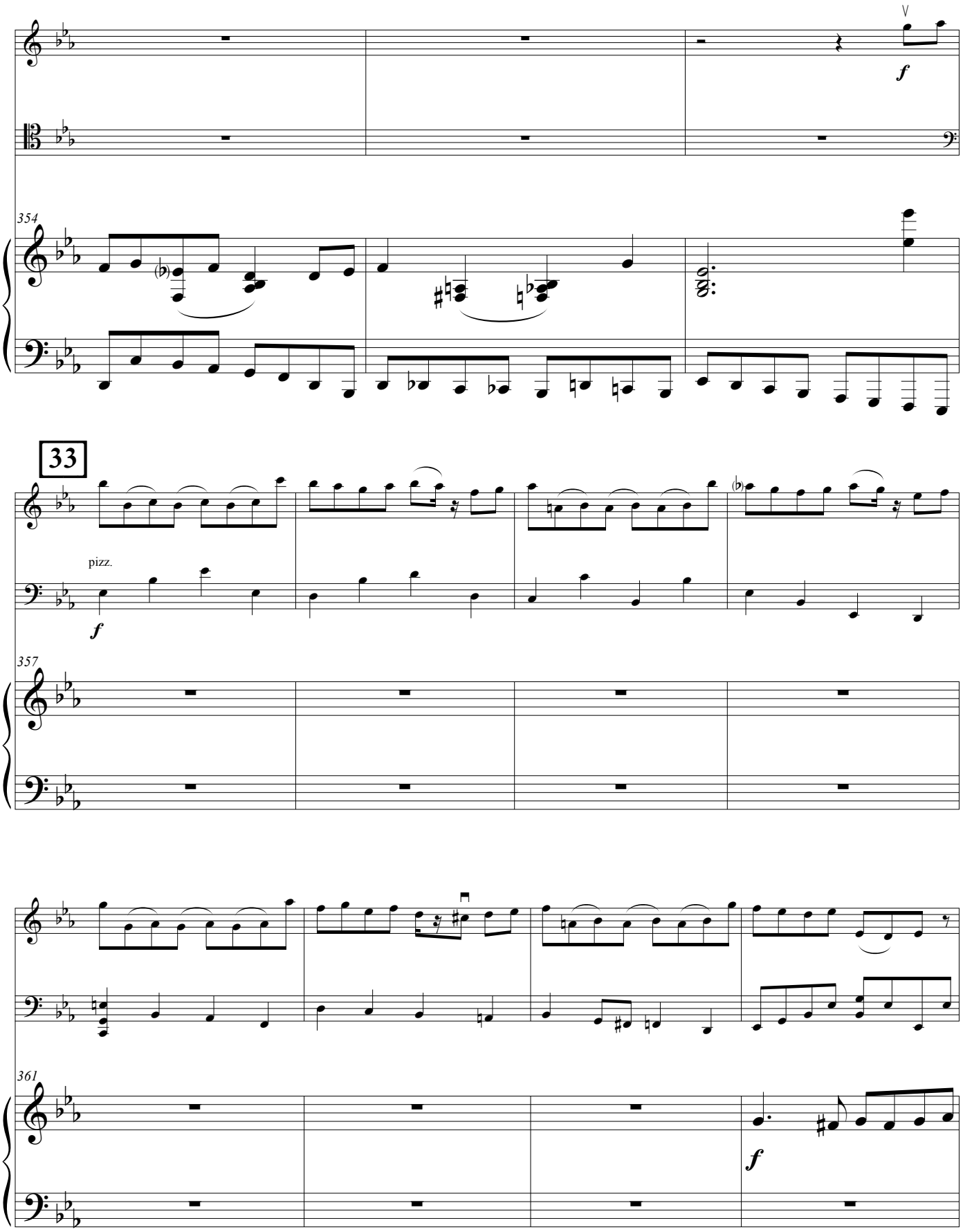
351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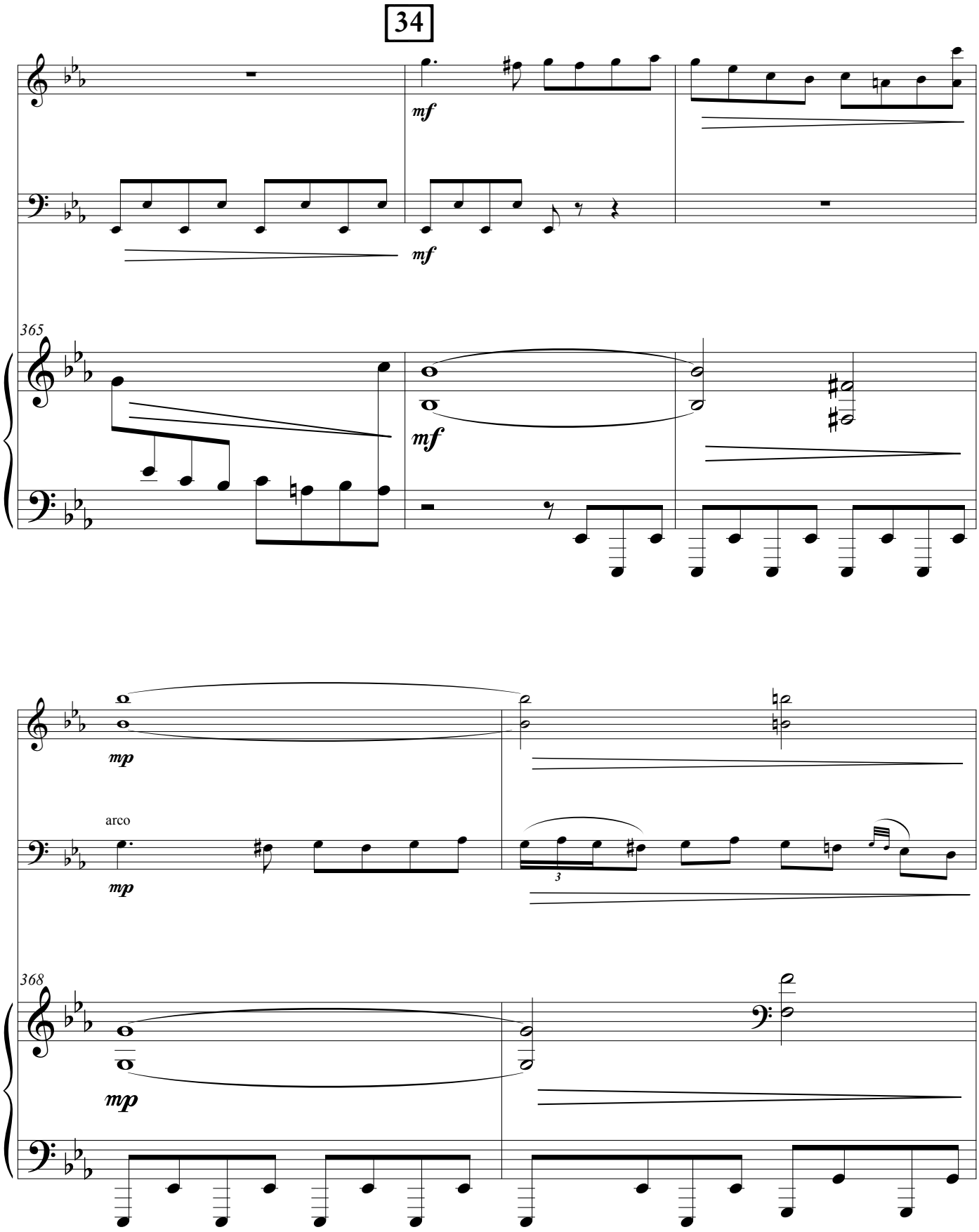
357
361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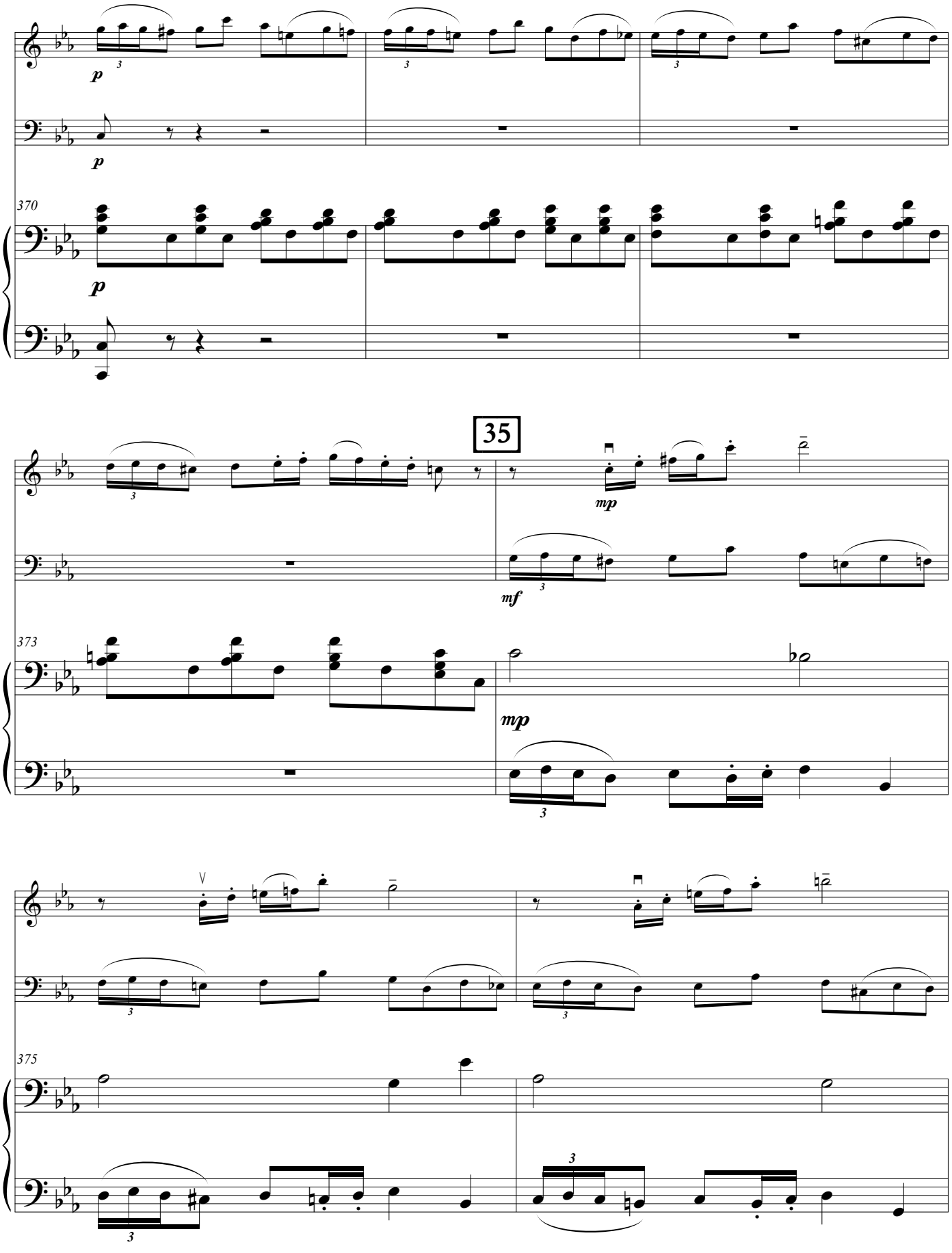
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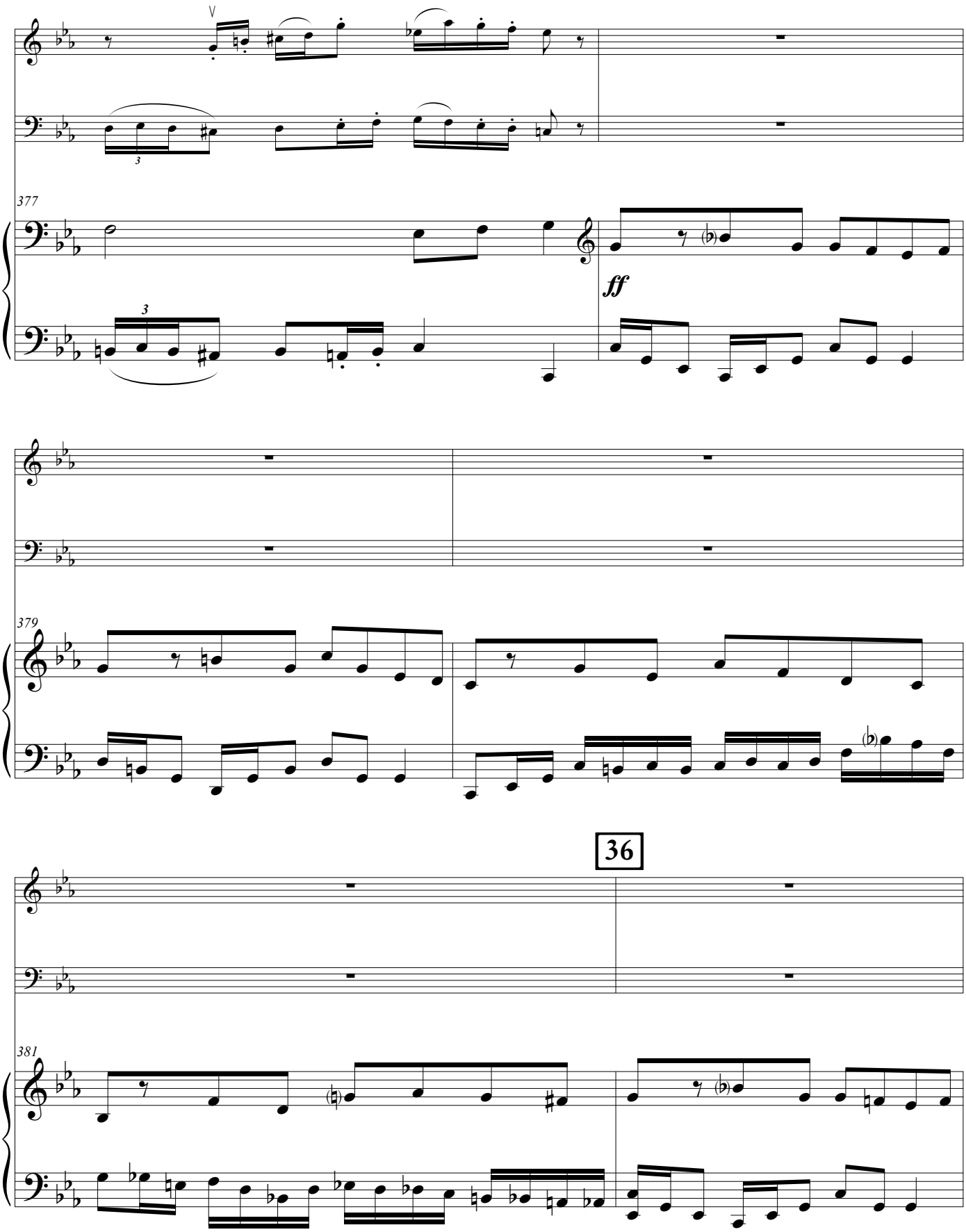
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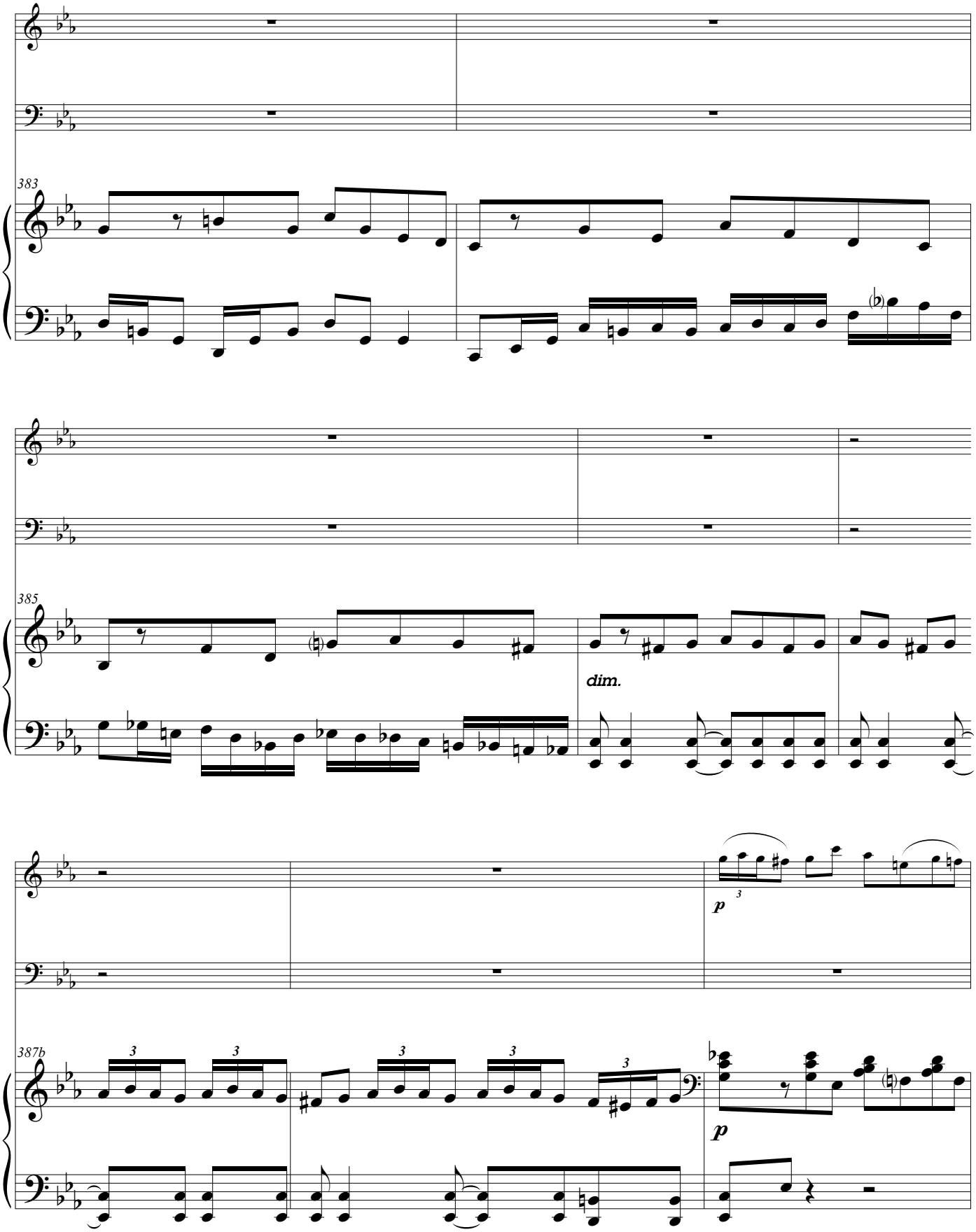
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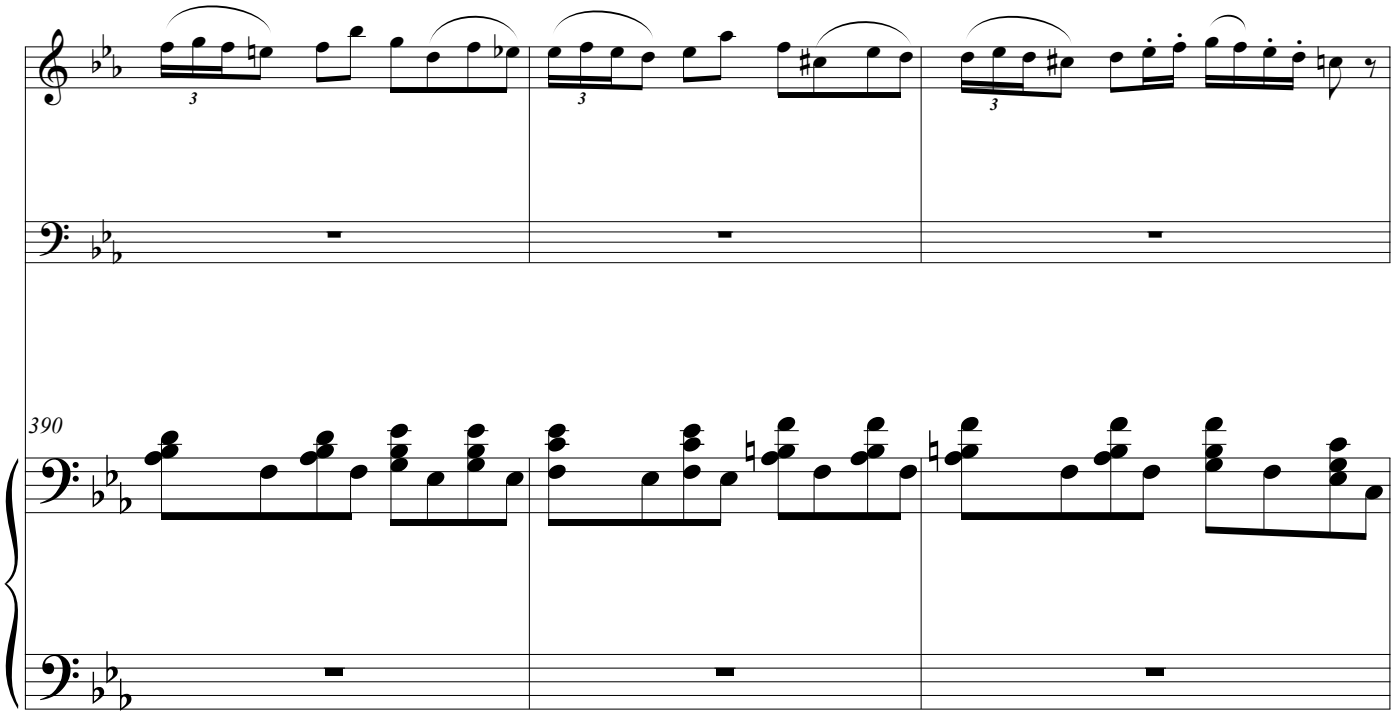
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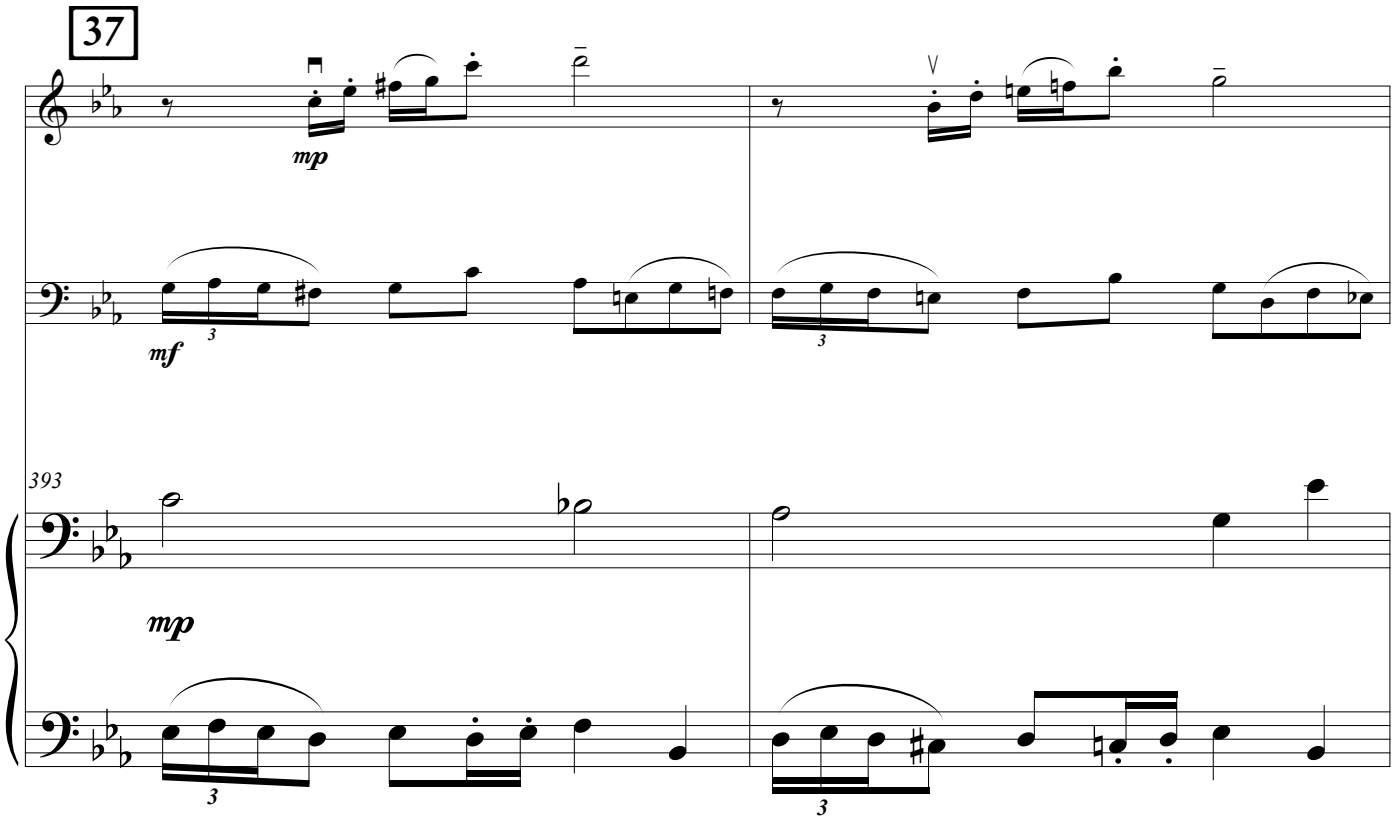
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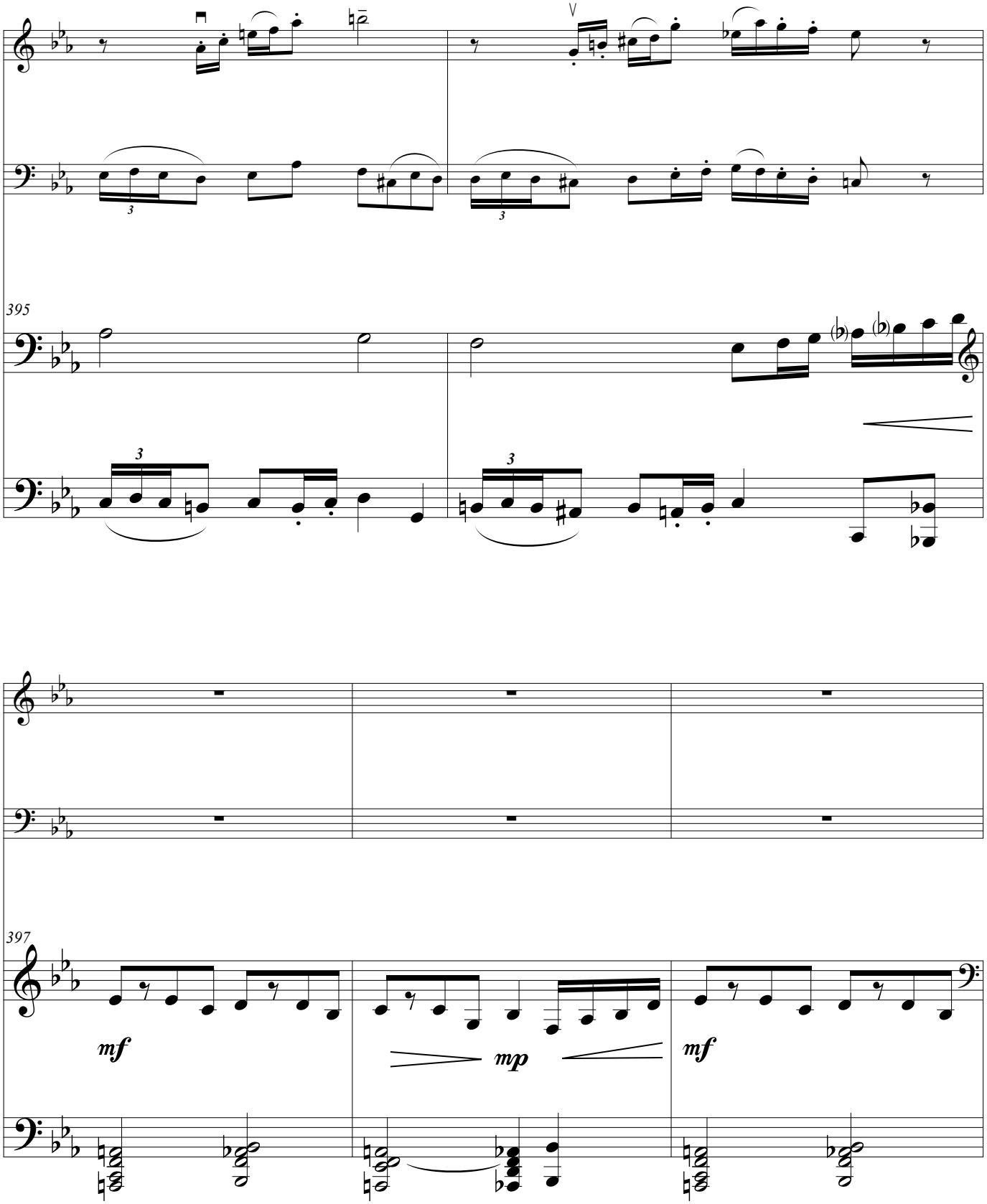
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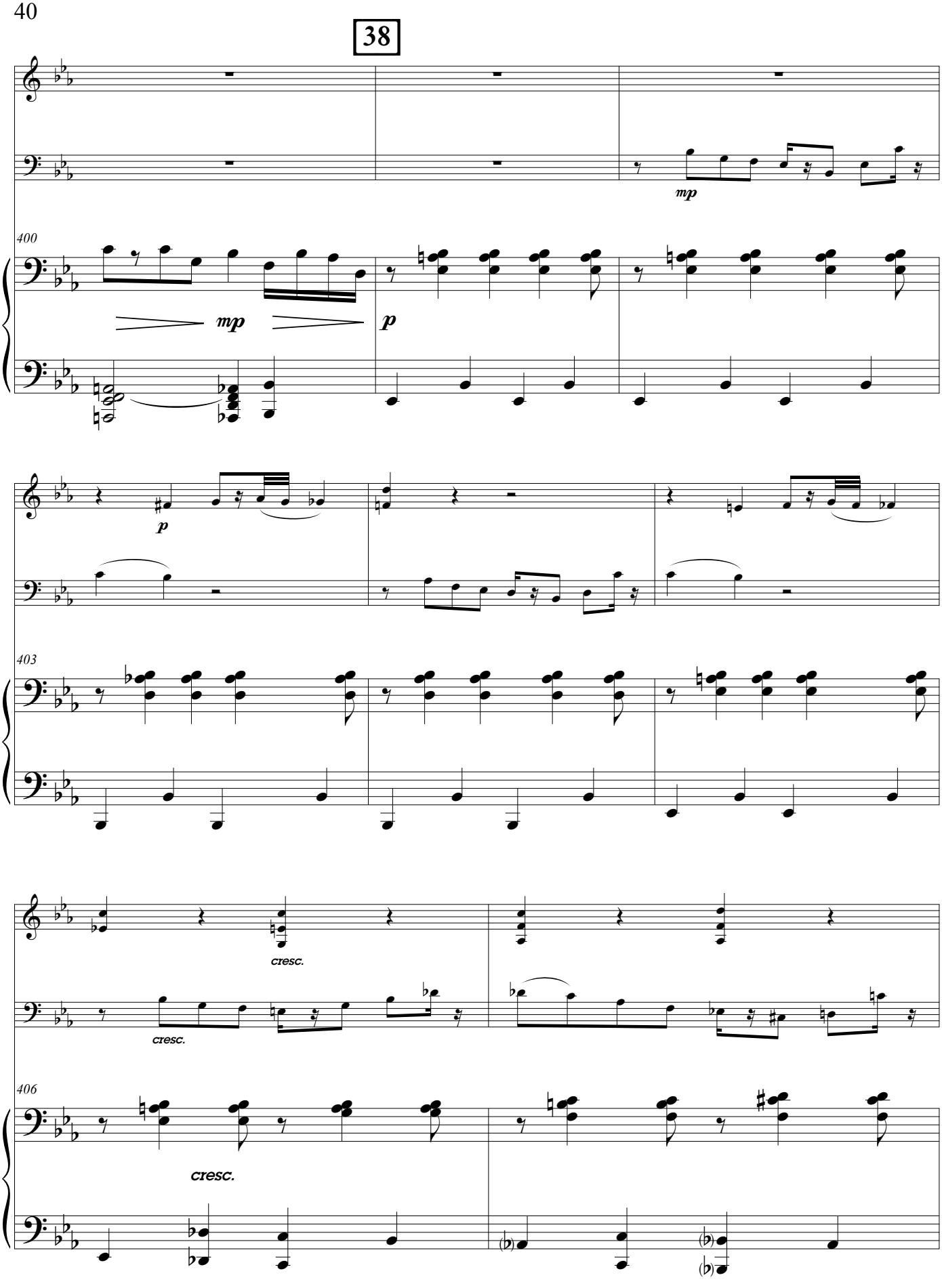
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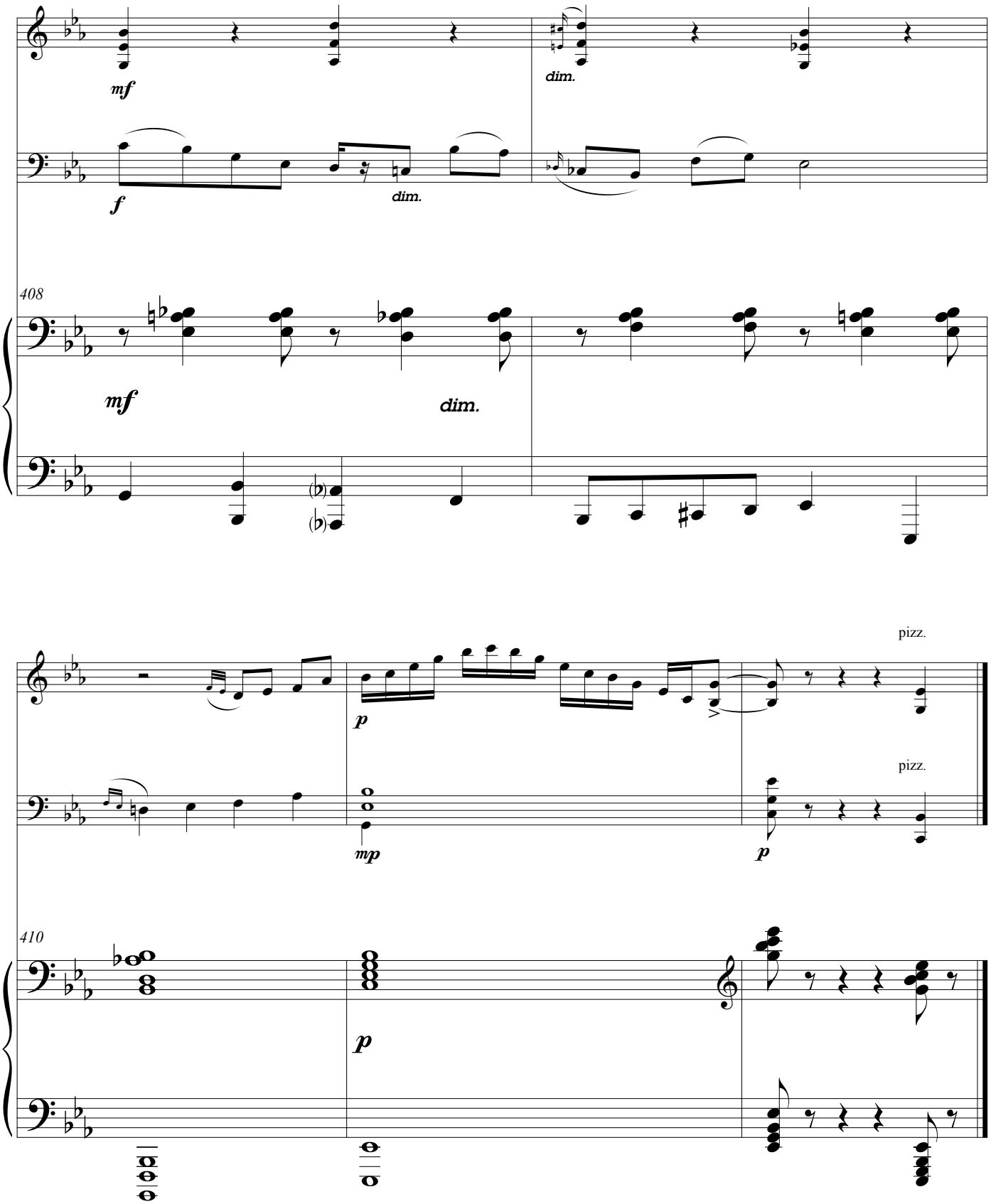
406
cresc.




to Charles Wazanowski